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with emphasis on effects on pupils with special needs.**

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***Small Schools, Interaction and Empathy:***  
***A Study of Teachers' Behaviour and Practices,***  
***with Emphasis on Effects on Pupils with Special Needs***

***Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir***

***A dissertation submitted to University of Bristol***  
***in accordance with the requirements for***  
***the degree of Doctor of Philosophy***  
***in the Faculty of Social Sciences.***

**September**  
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## Abstract

This study started out from the hypothesis that the low number of pupils in small schools creates opportunities that enable teachers to, a) consider pupils' individual needs, b) develop close teacher-pupil relationships, co-operation among staff and relationships with parents, c) apply teaching approaches suited for multi-grade classes. It is well known from the literature that teachers' behaviour has effects on pupils' self-consciousness, their social development and learning, not least the learning of pupils with special needs, who are in need for extended attention.

The study was conducted in both small and large schools in Iceland in order to obtain comparison and to identify teachers' practice and views of small schools. The study was threefold, based on a postal questionnaire sent to small schools, and classroom observation and interviews, in both small and large schools.

Teachers' behaviour in small and large schools, in relation to their practice and understanding, was grouped into three categories: outstanding, average and poor teachers. The expected high valuation of small schools did not materialise. In relationships, attention to pupils with special needs, teaching in multi-grade classes, development of the curriculum, working with parents and teachers' co-operation, the results indicate that half of the teachers in small schools do not offer an ideal environment. However, the other half of the teachers was categorised as 'outstanding'. These proportions turned out to be similar to those found in large schools.

The study has contributed several significant findings to the literature on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom. Most important of these findings is that personal characteristics seem to be good predictors of teacher competence, and there appear to be relationships between particular personal characteristics and teachers' practices in the classroom. Symbolic interactionists would argue that, the 'outstanding teachers' sense their 'self', that they are aware of what is expected of them and try to adjust their actions accordingly. In their social context, their conscious mind, self-awareness and self-regulation is central, and they become 'significant others' to pupils.

Fortunately, the literature suggests that attitude change can be accomplished through education. This knowledge opens the possibility for future research. The findings can provide the basis for a model of teacher practice and behaviour. It should be possible to build upon the strategies that the 'outstanding teachers' already think they have established in their work. For this to take place it is important to gain further knowledge of how these teachers initiate their relationships with pupils, how they provide for pupils' special needs and in what way they organise their work generally. This knowledge also paves the way for a type of teacher training that emphasises the ways in which learning occurs, as well as teachers' understanding of themselves and the ways in which their perspectives to a situation at a given time may influence their various decisions and behaviours.

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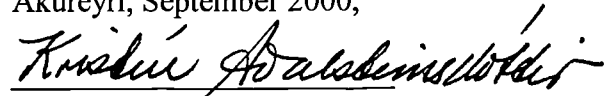


*I dedicate this work to my parents,  
Aðalsteinn Gíslason and Áslaug Jónsdóttir.*

### **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION:**

“I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol. The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.”

Akureyri, September 2000,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir', written in a cursive style.

Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir.

## Index:

<b>INDEX:</b> .....	V
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	XI
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	XII
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<i>The Educational System in Iceland</i> .....	3
<i>Teachers' Education and Situation in Iceland</i> .....	7
<i>Small Schools in Iceland</i> .....	9
<i>The Purpose of this Study</i> .....	11
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	14
<b>LEARNING AND INTERACTION</b> .....	14
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	14
1.2 LEARNING.....	16
1.3 INTERACTION .....	21
1.3.1 <i>Symbolic Interaction</i> .....	22
1.4 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM.....	30
1.4.1 <i>Body Messages</i> .....	33
1.4.2 <i>Voice Messages</i> .....	37
1.4.3 <i>Listening</i> .....	38
1.4.4 <i>Empathy</i> .....	38
1.5 TEACHERS' ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM.....	40
1.6 CONCLUSION .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	48
<b>TEACHER-PUPIL INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM</b> .....	48

2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	48
2.2 RESEARCH ON TEACHER/PUPIL INTERACTION .....	50
2.2.1 <i>Transactional Interaction</i> .....	50
2.2.2 <i>Individualised Interaction</i> .....	51
2.3 TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PUPILS.....	55
2.4 THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR ALL .....	60
2.4.1 <i>Special Educational Needs</i> .....	62
2.4.2 <i>Individual Needs</i> .....	68
2.4.3 <i>Meeting Children's Individual Needs</i> .....	70
2.5 CONCLUSION .....	75
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>THE POSSIBILITIES OF SMALL SCHOOLS .....</b>	<b>79</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	79
3.2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL SCHOOLS.....	80
3.2.1 <i>Problems of Small Schools</i> .....	81
3.2.2 <i>Advantages of Small Schools</i> .....	82
3.2.3 <i>Multi-grade Classes</i> .....	86
3.2.4 <i>Curriculum and Teaching Approaches in Small Schools</i> .....	89
3.3 TEACHER - PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS IN SMALL SCHOOLS .....	91
3.4 MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS IN SMALL SCHOOLS .....	92
3.5 SMALL SCHOOLS IN ICELAND .....	94
3.5.1 <i>Aims Education in Iceland</i> .....	95
3.5.2 <i>Situation and Responsibility of Teachers in Small Schools</i> .....	96
3.6 CLOSURE OF SMALL SCHOOLS .....	102
3.6.1 <i>Effects of School Closure on Pupils</i> .....	104
3.7 RESEARCH ON SMALL SCHOOLS IN ICELAND .....	104
3.8 CONCLUSION .....	110

<b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>114</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	114
4.2 EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH.....	116
4.3 COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY .....	117
4.4 QUANTITATIVE METHODS .....	120
4.4.1 <i>Questionnaires</i> .....	120
4.4.2 <i>Systematic (Non-participants) Observation</i> .....	121
4.5 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	124
4.5.1 <i>Semi-structured Interviews</i> .....	124
4.5.2 <i>Field Notes</i> .....	128
4.6 ETHICS .....	129
4.7 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY .....	130
4.8 INTERDEPENDENCE OF THEORY AND METHOD.....	132
4.8.1 <i>The Postal Questionnaire</i> .....	137
4.8.2 <i>The Observation</i> .....	138
4.8.3 <i>The Field Notes</i> .....	139
4.8.4 <i>The Interviews</i> .....	139
4.9 CONCLUSION .....	140
<b>CHAPTER 5 .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITUATION OF SMALL SCHOOLS IN ICELAND - STUDY I.....</b>	<b>142</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	142
5.2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY.....	143
5.3 METHOD.....	144
5.3.1 <i>Small Schools in Northeast Iceland</i> .....	144

5.3.2 Teachers in Small Schools in Iceland .....	146
5.3.3 Questions used .....	148
5.3.4 Procedure .....	149
5.3.5 Analysis .....	150
5.4 RESULTS .....	151
5.4.1 Respondents and the Schools .....	151
5.4.2 Characteristics of Small Schools .....	154
5.4.3 Teacher-Pupil Relationships .....	155
5.4.4 Relationship with Parents .....	157
5.4.5 Relationship with Colleagues .....	161
5.4.6 Meeting Pupils' Individual Needs in Small Schools .....	164
5.4.7 The School Curriculum .....	169
5.4.8 Teaching Approaches, Preparation and Teaching Arrangements .....	172
5.5 DISCUSSION .....	181
5.5.1 Conclusion .....	192
<b>CHAPTER 6 .....</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>OBSERVATION OF TEACHERS' BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM - STUDY II .....</b>	<b>195</b>
6.1 INTRODUCTION .....	195
6.2 AIM OF THE STUDY .....	198
6.3 PILOT STUDY .....	199
6.3.1 Measurement of Observers' Agreement .....	200
6.4 THE METHOD .....	202
6.4.1 The Sample .....	202
6.4.2 Procedure .....	202
6.4.3 Measures .....	204
6.4.4 Analyses .....	206
6.5 RESULTS .....	208
6.5.1 The Sample .....	208
6.5.2 Teachers' Behaviour .....	210

6.6 DISCUSSION.....	219
<b>CHAPTER 7.....</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF THEIR INTERACTION AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM - STUDY III.....</b>	<b>226</b>
7.1 INTRODUCTION.....	226
7.2 AIM OF THE STUDY .....	228
7.3 PILOT STUDY.....	229
7.4 METHOD .....	229
7.4.1 <i>The Sample</i> .....	229
7.4.2 <i>Procedure</i> .....	230
7.4.3 <i>Analysis</i> .....	233
7.5 RESULTS.....	235
7.5.1 <i>Special Needs</i> .....	235
7.5.2 <i>Empathetic Behaviour</i> .....	239
7.5.3 <i>Interaction in the Classroom</i> .....	244
7.5.4 <i>Discipline in the Classroom</i> .....	247
7.5.5 <i>Relationships with Parents</i> .....	250
7.5.6 <i>Teachers' Co-operation</i> .....	255
7.5.7 <i>Teaching Approaches</i> .....	258
7.6 DISCUSSION.....	263
<b>CHAPTER 8.....</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>272</b>
8.1 HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FINDINGS.....	272
8.1.1 <i>The overall findings in Small and Large Schools</i> .....	272
8.1.2 <i>Theory on Small Schools</i> .....	275
8.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS AND THE THEORETICAL ISSUES ARISING .....	281
8.2.1 <i>Teacher-Pupil Interaction and the Teacher as a Person</i> .....	281
8.2.2 <i>Education for All Pupils</i> .....	287

8.2.3 <i>Practices in Small Schools and Teachers' Learning</i> .....	293
8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH .....	302
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	304
<b>APPENDIX I:</b> .....	322
A LETTER REGARDING PILOT STUDY I .....	322
<b>APPENDIX II:</b> .....	323
A LETTER TO TEACHERS AND HEAD TEACHERS, STUDY I.....	323
<b>APPENDIX III:</b> .....	324
THE POSTAL QUESTIONNAIRE.....	324
<b>APPENDIX IV:</b> .....	345
A LETTER TO HEAD TEACHERS REGARDING STUDY II AND III.....	345
<b>APPENDIX V:</b> .....	346
A LETTER TO TEACHERS, STUDY II AND III .....	346
<b>APPENDIX VI:</b> .....	348
THE OBSERVATION SCHEME .....	348
<b>APPENDIX VII:</b> .....	351
THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	351



## List of Tables

Table 3.1	Numbers of Schools and Pupils in Iceland. Number of Small Schools and Pupils in Small Schools in 1994-1995 (Statistic of Iceland, 1996) .....	95
Table 3.2	Teachers' Yearly Teaching Schedule 1994-1995 (Statistic of Iceland, 1996:286) .....	97
Table 3.3	Teachers holding 0.50- 0.99 Positions 1994-1995 (Statistic of Iceland, 1996:286) .....	98
Table 3.4	Proportion of Qualified Teachers and Unqualified Teachers in 1994-1995 (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1999b) .....	99
Table 5.1	Small Schools in Northeast Iceland, Number Pupils, Age and Teaching Staff, in the School Year 1994 –1995 (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1994) .....	145
Table 5.2	Pupils with Special Education Needs in Northeast Iceland, in 1994-1995 (Educational Office North East Iceland, 1996) .....	146
Table 5.3	Number of Teachers in Northeast Iceland, in 1994–1995 (Educational Office, Akureyri, 1998).....	147
Table 5.4	Teachers' Teaching-Schedule in Small Schools, in 1994-1995 (Educational Office, North East Iceland, 1996) .....	148
Table 5.5	Number of Respondents and their Designation.....	151
Table 5.6	Responses according to School Characteristics .....	152
Table 5.7	Teachers' Years of Teaching Experience.....	152
Table 5.8	Teaching Experience according to Designation .....	153
Table 5.9	Teaching Experience in the Current School.....	153
Table 5.10	Teachers' Time Schedule (n=55) .....	154
Table 5.11	Teachers' Views on positive Characteristics of Small Schools.....	155
Table 5.12	Teachers' Views on negative Characteristics of Small Schools.....	155
Table 5.13	Close Teacher-Pupil Relationship in Small Schools (n=54) .....	156
Table 5.14	Close Relationships between Pupils in Small Schools (n=53) .....	156
Table 5.15	Issues promoting good Relationship in Small Schools (n=46).....	157
Table 5.16	The small Community promotes close Relationships with Parents (n=53)....	158
Table 5.17	Parents are encouraged to contact the Teachers in Small Schools (n=53) .....	158
Table 5.18	Teachers contact Parents to seek Information about their Children (n=53) ...	159
Table 5.19	Parents are contacted as soon as Problems arise (n=52) .....	160
Table 5.20	Organised Co-operation between Teachers in Small Schools (n=53) .....	161
Table 5.21	The Organisation of Co-operation between Teachers in Small Schools (n=37).....	162
Table 5.22	In Teachers' Collaboration, Attention is on Pupils' individual Needs (n=52).....	163
Table 5.23	Teachers' Professional Isolation (n=53).....	164

Table 5.24	Teaching Methods chosen according to individual Programme of Children with Special Needs (n=45).....	165
Table 5.25	Children's Special Needs considered in the School Curriculum (n=41).....	167
Table 5.26	School Curriculum designed in Collaboration (n=50) .....	169
Table 5.27	Class Teachers are responsible for meeting Children's individual Needs (n=42).....	171
Table 5.28	Pupils Tasks are set according to their Needs (n=53) .....	173
Table 5.29	New Topics/Issues are taught individually (n=53).....	173
Table 5.30	Teachers intentionally teach Pupils to work independently (n=53) .....	174
Table 5.31	Teachers intentionally teach Pupils to co-operate (n=52) .....	175
Table 5.32	Teaching Material has Effect on Teaching (n=53).....	177
Table 5.33	Teaching Arrangements in the Classroom .....	178
Table 5.34	All Pupils of same Age carry out the same Tasks at the same Time (n=53)..	179
Table 5.35	Seating Arrangement in the Classroom.....	180
Table 6.1	Proportion of Agreement actually observed (Po) and Proportion of Agreement expected by Chance (Pc) .....	200
Table 6.2	Results of Observers' Agreement.....	201
Table 6.3	Small Schools: Size, Number of Pupils, Pupils' Age, Pupils with Special Needs and Teachers' Experience .....	209
Table 6.4	Large Schools: Size, Number of Pupils, Pupils' Age, Pupils with Special Needs and Teachers' Experience .....	209
Table 6.5	Field-Notes in Small Schools .....	213
Table 6.6	Field-Notes in Large Schools .....	214
Table 6.7	Pupils in Large and Small Schools reported with Special Needs .....	216
Table 7.1	Categories and Codes for Analysis of the Interview Transcript.....	234

## List of Figures

Figure 6.1	Categories of Teachers in Small and Large Schools.....	217
Figure 6.2	Teachers' Behaviour and Size of Class.....	218
Figure 6.3	Teachers Behaviour and Length of Experience.....	218

## ***Introduction***

The purpose of this study is to examine the ability of small schools in Iceland to meet the individual needs of children with learning difficulties. The study further examines teachers' non-verbal behaviour in the classroom; teachers' understanding of their own teaching related behaviour and the relationships among schools size, teachers' self perceptions and the consequences for all pupils. Towards these ends, teachers in schools in Northeast Iceland were studied.

Iceland is an island in the North Atlantic Ocean, on the border of the temperate and arctic zones. The country is a land of contrasts. Geological forces are hard at work shaping the appearance of the country: Eruptions occur frequently and geological phenomena such as hot springs, waterfalls, rivers and rugged and colourful mountains are common. Glaciers cover ten percent of the country, and glacial rivers rush to the sea in all directions. "Iceland represents the most extremely inhospitable environment in which a European people has been able to survive and maintain its culture" (Tomasson, 1980:57). In this ever-changing land with its harsh climatic conditions, most people have chosen coastal settlements, with almost half of the population living in the capital, Reykjavík, and surrounding areas. With a population of 280,000 inhabitants, Iceland may be regarded as one of the smallest countries in the world. However, the country has a national language and a distinctive history and literature. In half a century, Iceland's economic status has shifted from one of the poorest in Europe to one of the fastest growing OECD countries. For decades, the rate of unemployment has been one of the lowest among the OECD countries, being approximately 2% at the end of 1998 (Gunnarsson, 2000).

For centuries there was a tradition of home-based teaching in Iceland, parents were responsible for the education of their children and the greater part of their training took place in the home. It was not until 1907 that compulsory education for children between the ages of 10 and

14 years was established by law. This change resulted in more stable teaching for most children; however children who had learning difficulties or disabilities were not expected to attend school (Sigurðsson, 1993:27). The availability of schools was closely linked to the geological and social situation in rural areas (Guttormsson, 1992).

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a progressive change in Icelandic society, which resulted in great changes in education (Guðmundsson and Karlsson, 1997:332). Comprehensive education was established by the Educational Act of 1946. One of the main objectives of the Act was to construct various opportunities within education as well as to reduce inequalities created by the economic disparities that existed in the country at that time (Educational Act, 1946, Explanatory statement). By the Educational Act of 1974 was a huge step in educational policy in Iceland. From the Act it could be understood that pupils should not be ranked in classes according to ability and that all pupils should have the right to education according to their abilities (Educational Act, 1974: §50gr.). Disabled children began to show up within the schools closest to their neighbourhood. Teachers agreed to have these children in their classes; some teachers hesitated but most were well-disposed (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1988). This arrangement made new demands on teachers, who had not receive training on ways to organise special education or how to meet the individual needs of these children. The Act pronounced that special teachers should teach children with special needs, when possible. This was not a realistic requirement, even though the only Teaching Training College in the country had decided as early as 1970 to make special education a priority in post-graduate studies. There was a considerable lack of special teachers in the country as well as qualified teachers generally. In 1991, the Educational Act from 1974 was replaced but the changes were minimal. In 1995 a new Educational Act was legislated in Iceland, which was a turning point for special educational policy in the country. This will be discussed in the following section.

## The Educational System in Iceland

The Primary and Secondary School, or *grunnskóli*<sup>1</sup>, is a school for children and adolescents between 6 and 16 years of age. There is no division between primary and secondary schools. Pupils attend the school nearest their home. Private schools are rarely operated in the country.

According to the Educational Act of 1995, the role of *grunnskóli*, is to prepare pupils for life and work in a continuously developing democratic society. The fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone should have equal access to education, irrespective of gender, economic status, residential location, possible handicap, and cultural or social background. The law stipulates that all children are to receive suitable instruction, taking into account the nature of the pupil and his or her needs and promoting the development, health and education of each individual. Tolerance, Christian values and democratic co-operation shall therefore guide the educational methods (Educational Act, 1995). Thus, inclusion is an official government policy in the country. The aim of the Icelandic National Curriculum (1999) is to clarify the objectives of teaching and learning. The curriculum has to satisfy the requirements of the Act, which are that the curriculum should be carefully considered and broadly based as well as differentiated, so that what is taught is according to individual pupils' abilities and aptitudes (Educational Act, 1995: §29 and §31).

Each year, all schools in the country are required to issue a school curriculum. The head teachers are held responsible for overseeing the work, which is carried out by teachers. The school curriculum is a further expansion of the National Curriculum (Educational Act, 1995). National examinations are held, in 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades in Icelandic and Mathematics (Regulation no. 415/2000), and 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupils take final National examinations in core subjects. Certain regulations apply to

---

<sup>1</sup> The compulsory stage, including the primary and secondary school (6-16 years) has been based, since 1974, on the concept *grunnskóli*.

disabled children, children who suffer from chronic illnesses, or such other difficulties as dyslexia. When these children leave school, they are given a certificate, which states that they have completed compulsory school, subjects should be listed and also an explanation of how the results were obtained (Regulation no. 709/1996). Each *grunnskóli* is responsible for applying methods to evaluate school processes, such as teaching and management, for interaction within the school and for external relationships. On behalf of the Educational Ministry, an inspection should be conducted every five years on the school's evaluation methods (Educational Act, 1995: §49). The principles in the Educational Act of 1995 are in coherence with the Educational Acts of 1974 and 1991. However, two major changes were legislated; firstly, the Educational Act (1995) stated that the Icelandic Compulsory School *grunnskóli* should be decentralised and transferred from state level to Local Community level. This change took place in 1996 and brought about major structural transformation. Second, a major change was made within special educational policy, which involved the deletion of the concepts: "*special educational needs*," "*special educational provisions*," "*special education*" and "*special teacher*," from the previous Act.

The reasons for this change can be traced back to the establishment of a committee whose task was to review the Educational Act (1991) for Compulsory Schools and the Educational Act for High Schools from 1989, as well as to outline the Ministries' Educational Policy. The committee's recommendations led to the creation of the Educational Act of 1995. The committee suggested that in the forthcoming Educational Act, there was no need for special paragraphs about special education; if schools are to emphasise the right of education for all, the Act should not include particular paragraphs to emphasise the rights of some pupils above others. In the view of the committee, the concepts 'special education' and 'special educational provisions' often created confusion. Frequently the concepts were tied to financial questions rather than to special educational methodology. According to the intent of the 1974

and 1991 Educational Acts, special teachers were expected to teach children with special educational needs whenever possible. This provision often led to segregation of children with special needs, a situation that required change. The committee also agreed that as teacher training was now to be conducted at the university level, teachers should be prepared to meet the needs of all pupils (Þorsteinsson, 2001). The intention behind these changes based on the notion that all children have some special needs was to ease the process of inclusion, to create flexibility in schooling, and to provide all children with the same right to education. However, this document did involve some discussion of disabled children and children with learning difficulties. Paragraph §37 in the new Act (Educational Act, 1995) deals with issues concerning children who have problems due to specific learning difficulties such as; emotional or social difficulties and/or disabilities<sup>2</sup>, contending that these children have the right to special provisions in ordinary schools or in special schools or units, when the ordinary school can not meet pupils' individual needs. Paragraph §37 is in contradiction with other paragraphs that deal with inclusion in the Act. The issue it raises could have been dealt with in The National Curriculum, as it contains the framework for schools to use to organise and coordinate their work. The status of Individual Education Plans is that each school is required to organise a curriculum and evaluation scheme for individual children or groups of children with disabilities or learning difficulties, and to provide them with learning according to their needs.

In spite of the fundamental changes in special educational policy that were legislated by the 1995 Educational Act, a year later the Ministry of Education published a Regulation for Special Education (no. 389/1996). There the deleted concepts about special education emerged again and the Regulation contradicts the basic objectives of the Educational Act (1995). There the conditions for special education is defined:

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<sup>2</sup> Disabilities refer to mental disabilities, motor disabilities, visual problems and hard of hearing or deaf pupils. It may also be a result of chronic illnesses as well or accidents.

In comparison to the learning needs of most pupils at the same age-level, special education requires considerable changes in objectives, teaching material, conditions for learning, and/or teaching approaches. Special education needs to be organised for a longer or shorter period at a time, according to pupils' individual needs (Regulation for Special Education, no. 389/1996: §3).

In addition, a few new issues emerged in the Regulation (no. 389/1996). First, in §13 it is stated that in schools with more than 200 pupils, one teacher should be in charge of special education as well as being responsible for contacting special services on behalf of pupils with special needs when needed. Second, in §14 it is stated that head teachers and teachers in charge of special education should draw up a plan for special education within the schools. This plan should be prepared for groups and individual pupils as necessary. Third, local authorities are allowed to employ support staff in order to help disabled pupils.

The inconsistency between the Educational Act (1995) and the Regulation (no. 389/1996) can lead to segregation rather than inclusion. Teachers can hide behind the Regulation and claim that it is not their responsibility to teach some pupils (Þorsteinsson, 1996). Þorsteinsson (1996) also maintains that these aspects should rather be dealt with in The National Curriculum. The National Curriculum provides staff with the possibility to interpret and coordinate the Educational Act and Regulations. It is a framework for schools that school staff can use to organise and coordinate their work.

As in the former Regulation on Special Education (no.106/1992.), the recent Regulation for Special Education (no. 389/1996) declared that special education should be carried out by a special education teacher when possible, or under her/his inspection. The supplement indicates that when it is considered more favourable for a pupil to obtain special education by his/her teacher, this should be the practice. This point is not explained further.



When local authorities confront the problem that pupils can not obtain teaching according to their individual needs, they are obliged to establish special units or special schools in order to meet these pupils' needs for longer or shorter periods. They are also required to offer counselling and educational advice to staff. Special teachers should carry out this teaching whenever possible (Educational Act, 1995 §38). It may be problematic for LEA's<sup>3</sup> to meet these requirements, as there are only six special schools in Iceland, and they are all in the Reykjavík area but one, that is in Akureyri. These schools are for deaf children; autistic children; pupils with emotional and social difficulties, mental difficulties and severe learning difficulties. In some ordinary schools special units have been set up, e.g. for visually deprived children and children with emotional and social problems. The reason for the small number of special schools in the country may be the inclusion movement, but partly this is because many of the local communities around the country are too small for provisions of this sort. Therefore, pupils who experience learning difficulties attend ordinary schools, both because of pressure from parents and professionals as well as this being the only provision available, if the children are not to be sent away from home to the Reykjavík area.

### Teachers' Education and Situation in Iceland

To qualify as a teacher in Iceland at compulsory school level, three-years teacher training at university level is required. The Icelandic University of Education (in Reykjavík) offers postgraduate programme of 15 to 60 units (30-120 ECTS) for teachers leading to a diploma in Education or a M.Ed.-degree after 60 units (120 ECTS). Students can specialise in different fields, such as administration, curriculum and instruction, education theory, special education or educational technology. The University of Iceland offers comparable M.Ed. programme. The

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<sup>3</sup> LEA (Local Educational Authorities).

University of Akureyri also offers postgraduate programme in administration and special education. The themes of the programme are critical thinking and reflective practice. A diploma requires 30 units, and MEd 60 units. In both these Universities, special emphasis is placed on distance learning and the use of information technology.

Teachers' participation in training or continuing education is not compulsory but it is recommended that teachers attend training courses at least every second year (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1995:23).

Teachers' interest in continuing education has been considerable.

Postgraduate programme for teachers and head-teachers have been received with considerable interest. An investigation on continuing education in Iceland shows that the opportunity has had a substantial effect on teachers' practice and self-esteem; teachers expect to gain knowledge and skills, but in addition they find this type of education challenging, and that it has encouraged them to initiate innovative changes within their schools (Kristinsdóttir and Jóhannsson, 1999).

According to the Ministry of Culture and Education (1999) 3.484 teachers were employed at compulsory school level in Iceland in autumn 1995. Teachers are employed in part-time and full-time positions. Yet, their annual teaching schedule, i.e. the number of hours taught may not always be the same as stated in their contract. Quite often teachers take on more work than contractually agreed upon, and many teachers work overtime.

This is partly due to a general lack of qualified teachers in the country, a situation that has created extensive problems during past years. It has been particularly difficult to staff schools in rural areas and villages. The problem of employing qualified teachers who have a long-term commitment to the schools and live in the local community has been particularly pressing for small schools. Such a situation is bound to have extensive consequences. The lack of qualified teachers in Iceland led Johnsen, Hansen, Sigurgeirsson, Proppé and Bjarnadóttir (1989) to

conclude that the shortage of formally qualified teachers was a major problem in rural areas. In areas where the problem has reached the most serious proportions, only half of the teachers were qualified (Johnsen, et al., 1989:4). In varying degrees the shortage of qualified teachers appears to affect almost all the schools in the country, outside the Reykjaví area. Under such adverse circumstances, it is indeed difficult to organise instruction and to initiate successful staff development. But above all, the situation is likely to be difficult for pupils who have difficulties and a need for specific attention and provisions.

### Small Schools in Iceland

In the school year, 1994-1995 there were 201 compulsory schools 'grunnskóli' in Iceland, of which 81 were small schools with less than 100 pupils in multi-grade classes. Although almost half of the compulsory schools in Iceland are small, these schools only represent 9% of pupils in schools at this level in the country. The decision to decentralise Icelandic Compulsory Schools 'grunnskóli' escalated an ongoing debate about the viability of small schools. In spite of a lack of research in the field, some small schools had already been closed down before these changes were implemented. On behalf of the authorities, the debate about closure has not been about whether small schools could provide effective education for the pupils due to their size. Closure seems to have occurred mainly for financial reasons. The closure of three schools in Northeast Iceland did not however lead to any budget savings (Birgir Þórðarson, 1996). Since these changes were implemented, schools have increasingly been closed in order to try to achieve budget savings. Professional considerations have not been the motive behind such changes. The arguments in favour of financial decisions may not necessarily apply to educational arguments and are liable to disregard the individual needs of children. This view is supported by Comber et al. (1981) who found that if decisions are made in narrow financial accounting terms, only some small savings can accrue to the LEA. In a recent report by one LEA in the UK, it is argued

that the advantages of small schools include the cultural, social and economical benefits for a community in retaining its own school. Further, opportunities to forge strong school and community links, including links with other schools in the community; minimum travelling time and cost for parents and the LEA; opportunities to develop strong school ethos, good pastoral care, and detailed knowledge of pupils and families; opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to develop socially (Mann, 1996:4). The school thus takes on the identity of the local community and also has a role in shaping the culture and community within the locality, as well as sustaining such ties with neighbouring regions. The immediate nature of interpersonal relationships within the community is likely to benefit pupils, both with regard to educational and social factors.

*Harðardóttir and Magnússon (1990) pointed out that their study on small schools in Iceland showed examples of good planning and teaching. However, they found several factors, which inhibit effective schooling. Among these are: lack of professional skills among teachers; lack of devotion to teaching; shortage of qualified teachers; high mobility of staff and teachers who have not been trained for the particular circumstances such as multi-grade teaching that exist in small schools (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990).*

Small schools in Iceland are in good position to influence the teacher-pupil relationship favourably, particularly as regards pupils who experience learning difficulties. It may be postulated that in small schools the limited number of pupils in class can enable teachers to meet the individual needs of pupils both socially, emotionally and educationally, because of the thorough knowledge they can acquire about each child. It has also been found that teachers in small schools have a significant advantage in being able to give pupils personal attention and in recognising the pupils' individual needs (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1988). These benefits can also extend to pupils with disabilities because the

learning environment can be adjusted towards meeting each child's potential (Eggertsdóttir, 2000).

It can be assumed that the family atmosphere in small schools can create opportunities to develop close teacher-pupil relationships. Therefore, teachers' behaviour and actions may have extensive effects on pupils' social development and learning. As a result, the quality of teachers' behaviour and perceptions may be of vital importance. This situation is likely to influence all children including those who experience learning difficulties. It has been found that disabled pupils are welcome and accepted in some schools in the countryside in Iceland although pupils' learning procedures often appeared to be disorganised (Marínósson and Traustadóttir, 1993). In order to respond to pupils' individual needs, teachers need to understand these needs, discover them, gather information and provide for such needs in the curriculum.

The small schools can draw upon the expertise of parents and local residents to enrich the curriculum. In addition, as the head teacher has a substantial class-teaching role, it can enable her/him to influence curriculum change easily. It has been found that some head teachers in small schools in Iceland are raising standards of small schools in the country. They have a clear vision of how they want their school to develop and are influential in developing the school's vision and policy (Sigþórsson, 1995).

Johnsen et al. (1989) found that the shortage of qualified teachers affect almost all schools in Iceland. Co-operation within small schools and forming networks can ensure professional support and a close relationship between teachers within many small schools may have advantages.

### The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study as a whole is twofold:

1. To study the characteristics and situation of small schools; particularly their scope in meeting the learning needs of individual pupils.
2. To gain insight and understanding of teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom and teachers' own understanding of their behaviour and actions in the classroom.

The study of small schools included questioning how the limited number of pupils per teacher; the opportunity to build up close teacher-pupil relationships and co-operation among staff; as well as questions concerning teachers' understanding of children with learning difficulties; curriculum issues in small schools; and teaching approaches within multi-grade classes; and links with parents.

The study on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom was designed to provide information on aspects of teachers' behaviour and how this behaviour may affect pupils, especially pupils who face difficulties. These aspects included teachers' non-verbal communication, their empathetic behaviour as well as their perspectives and choices. This study was conducted in both small and large schools to make it possible to compare teachers' behaviour in schools of different size. The evidence provided was meant to identify what messages teachers may convey through their non-verbal behaviour, and how sensitive they are to pupils' individual needs.

The study on teachers' understanding of their own behaviour included: collecting information about teachers' understanding of pupils' needs; teachers' understanding of their own verbal and non-verbal behaviour; teachers' beliefs concerning interaction in the classroom; and examining teachers' relationships with parents and colleagues and analysing their teaching methods.

Several schools in Northeast of Iceland were chosen for the study. In 1994-1995, there were eight LEA's in Iceland, with Reykjavík and Southwest Iceland, as the largest LEA's. These two urban areas held 60% of all pupils in the country. Northeast Iceland is the largest LEA area outside the Reykjavík area, having 11% of the pupils in the country (Table 3.1). Northeast Iceland is an integrated area. The biggest town outside Reykjavík, Akureyri is located in the area; there are many small villages but also rural areas. For a period of time, the general believe has been in educational circles that the inclusion movement has been especially strong in Northeast Iceland. Andrésdóttir (1999) findings support this suggestion. She found a considerable difference in how special needs was managed in Reykjavík and Akureyri Education districts. Inclusive education was the dominant mode of response to diversity in Akureyri, where only two special units exists and support is usually provided in the classrooms. In Reykjavík, on the other hand, there were ten times the number of special units and most of the support takes place in small groups outside the classroom (Andrésdóttir, 1999). For this reason and because Northeast may be seen as a cross section of the society this region was of special interest for this study.

## CHAPTER 1

### LEARNING AND INTERACTION

#### *1.1 Introduction*

Each generation gives, during its time, new form to the aspirations that shape education (Bruner, 1977:1). In a recently published UNESCO report, the former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors declares on behalf of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development; as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development (Delors, 1996:13). According to this declaration education should, as Bruner (1977) has written, serve as a means of training well-balanced citizens for a democratic society. However, the attainment of this objective seems to be problematic. Simon (1985) asserts that contemporary theorising and empirical studies on education are both seriously misleading and, in many ways, shortsighted. He claims that human subjective experience is ignored. This criticism indicates that research as a rational activity, systematic and structured, is abolishing the value aspect of education. Woods (1996) maintains that science has undoubtedly made important contributions to education, but that it has at the same time oversimplified complex situations; by prioritising educational objectives instead of educational processes; objectifying knowledge, perceiving it as cognitively grasped and quantifiably measurable. He emphasises that teaching is a socially constructed activity. This also applies to science, “but in relation to current realities, it can only reach a part, and not necessarily the most important part, of the activity” (Woods, 1996:21). The prominent features of this activity are multiple forms of understanding and representation; creativity which also involves emotions (Woods, 1996).

Education is under an increased pressure of criticism in many countries. Creemers (1994) says that this criticism is directed to the outcomes of



education. He maintains that education is said to favour high-ability and high socio-economic status students and to be unfair to low-ability children. It is argued that children are not learning things in schools, which they need for their further education or later life (Creemers, 1994:1-3).

The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century reports that the Commission agreed, right from the beginning of its work, that meeting the challenges of the coming century would necessarily entail changing the aims of education and the expectations people have of what education can provide (Delors, 1996). “Traditional responses to the demand for education that are essentially quantitative and knowledge based are no longer appropriate” (Delors, 1996: 85). It is not enough to supply each child with a store of knowledge to be drawn on, rather:

Each individual must be equipped to seize learning opportunities throughout life, both to broaden her or his knowledge, skills and attitudes, and to adapt to a changing, complex and interdependent world (Delors, 1996:85).

The Commission presents the passage towards this task and states that it must be based on four fundamental types of learning, throughout a person’s life: “*learning to know*, that is acquiring the instruments of understanding; *learning to do*, so as to be able to act creatively on one’s environment; *learning to live together*, so as to be able to participate and co-operate with other people in all human activities; *and learning to be*, an essential progression which proceeds from the previous three” (Delors, 1996:86). Interestingly, the Commission emphasises that these four objectives should last throughout a person’s life and this path of knowledge should form a whole, because of the affinity between its components.

Elliott (1991) maintains that there is a pressure on professionals to view clients’ situations holistically: “to enter into greater dialogue with them about their concerns, and to arrive at collaborative decisions over how

their needs are best provided for” (Elliott, 1991:310-311). His remarks reflect the notion that, during the last decades, teachers have been under increasing pressure to understand how learning takes place, and to meet the educational needs of individuals.

## **1.2 Learning**

It can be argued that education should be based on a theory, which can explain how children learn. To answer questions about the process of learning, important theories have been advanced and investigated. Bigge and Shermis (1999) maintain that a learning theory is:

... a systematic integrated outlook in regard to the nature of the process whereby people relate to their environments in such a way as to enhance their ability to use both themselves and their environments in a most effective way (Bigge and Shermis, 1999:3).

Although learning theories contrast in many respects, they also share a common ground; they are empirical approaches to the study of human beings, centred on problems relevant to cognitive, motivational, perceptual, memory, coding and psycholinguistic processes. The thinking that underlies modern associationism<sup>4</sup> can be traced back to Aristotle, who placed great emphasis on experience as a determiner of human knowledge. Bigge and Shermis (1999) describe historically important ideas about the nature of learning and argue that already in the fourth century B.C., Aristotle observed that recollection of an item of knowledge was facilitated by a person’s associating that item or idea with another when he/she learned it. Associations, when two ideas are experienced together, seem to occur with such a frequency during learning, that they deserve to be called a basic process in learning (Gagné, 1977:75).

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<sup>4</sup> Webster (1989) defines the term as a systematic theory that explicates psychological phenomena in terms of primary mental processes, chiefly association, to which are attributed the simple and complex data and constructs of experience.

Three main conceptions of the learning process emerged prior to the twentieth century, and continue to influence schools: 'mental discipline', natural unfoldment or self-actualisation, and apperception. The basic orientation behind these theories was philosophical or speculative but not based on experimental psychology of learning. Rather, they were based on philosophers' speculations, on their own thought processes (Bigge and Shermis, 1999:21).

The central idea of 'mental discipline' was that the mind, envisioned as a non-physical substance, lies dormant until it is exercised. Bigge and Shermis (1999) explain how cognitive factors such as memory, will, reason and perserverance were regarded as being comparable to physiological muscles which were strengthened only through exercise, and subsequent to their adequate exercise they operated automatically. In this way, the idea was that learning processes required be strengthening or disciplining to produce intelligent behaviour (Bigge and Shermis, 1999:21). Adherents of 'mental discipline' thought that the primary value of education was the training effects on the mind. They claimed that education that is truly liberalising prepares people not only to live in the world, but more important, to live with themselves. Currently, ideas of 'mental discipline' are not widely accepted within education. Wood (1988) argues that there is growing evidence that it is difficult to induce learning solely by exercising pupils' minds.

Since the seventeenth century many philosophers and psychologists have concentrated upon developing systematic learning theories supported by experimentation instead of their own speculations. As a result one theory after another has emerged to challenge existing theories, some of which have had particular influence on primary schools. Pollard (1997) argues that most of these theories rest on elements of valuable insight as well as having their own respective strengths and weaknesses. Among them are the behaviourist theory, the cognitive-interactional models and the social - constructivist models.

B.F. Skinner (1904-1990) based his version of behaviourism upon the idea that learning is a function of change in overt behaviour. Thus, for a person to learn, a response has to be made *contingent* on the occurrence of a certain *stimulus condition*, which in turn brings about another *response* (Gagné, 1977:15). Behaviourist learning theory places the learner in a passive role, leaving the selection, pacing and evaluation to the teacher (Pollard, 1997:119). The approach can be easy to apply to large groups or a whole class. In such situations the teacher does not interact with pupils in the constructive way that is needed for actual learning. Rather the approach tends to be subject-based and difficult to apply to pupils' existing knowledge.

Skinner (1954) himself reflected upon the complications of behaviourism in a classroom. The path through a skilful programme, which moves forward through a series of progressive approximations to the final complex behaviour desired, is problematical. Nevertheless, Skinner argues that the most serious problem occurs when there is an infrequency of reinforcement in the classroom; the lapse of only a few seconds between response and reinforcement can destroy most of the effect (Skinner, 1954:90-92). It is a question whether such reinforcement, based on teaching knowledge and skills for the whole class, does connect with the learner's existing understanding and thereby facilitates learning (Pollard and Tann, 1993:105). The behaviourist model seems to underestimate the importance of pupils' understanding and ignores the part teachers and peers play in pupils' social development.

Bruner (1990) decries behavioural approaches for abandoning meaning making as a central concern of learning. He maintains that the object of psychology is achievement and extension of understanding; that learning is a meaning making, as contrasted with the behavioural training processes (Bruner, 1990:2-4). The spirit behind Bruner's theory is that one actively constructs knowledge by relating incoming information to a previously acquired frame of reference. Therefore, it is necessary to

make knowledge accessible to a child by modes of thinking that it already possesses or:

...that he could, so to speak, assemble by combining natural ways of thinking that he had not previously combined (Bruner, 1977:ix).

Bruner (1977) clarifies that the acquisition of new information, whatever its form, is an active process and a refinement of previous knowledge. Then, it is a transformation designed to go beyond information. Thirdly, explained by Bruner, learning is evaluation for checking whether the way a person manipulates information is adequate to a task (Bruner, 1977:48). Thus, Bruner's theory is a cognitive-interactionist one, as he sees the process of meanings created and negotiated within communities (Bigge and Shermis, 1999:134). Bruner (1987) highlighted the importance of 'transaction' in human relations, the mutual sharing of assumptions and beliefs about the world. In his studies on growth in human infancy, but in particular on the development of human language, he found that people act in accordance with their perceptions and choices, and reciprocate accordingly. He argues that most of our approaches to the world are mediated through negotiations with others. This reality, he maintains, gives an extraordinary force to Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development (Bruner, 1987:93).

Vygotsky, the soviet psychologist, viewed learning as a profoundly social process (John-Steiner and Sauberman, 1978:131). His theory places a central focus on social interaction as a medium in which children develop (Tudge and Rogoff, 1989). He saw the importance of the assistance and understanding of a more skilled adult or other more mature children in the learning process. In his early career in the 1930s, Vygotsky dealt with problems of educational practice, especially education of the mentally and physically handicapped. Through medical problems such as blindness, aphasia and several others disabilities, Vygotsky saw opportunities, both for understanding mental processes of all people as well as establishing programme for treatment and remediation (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner and Souberman, 1978:9). He

showed that the capabilities of children with equal levels of mental development to learn under an adult's guidance varied to a high degree, and therefore it became apparent that these children were not at the same mental age. Their subsequent course of learning would also be different. This difference is what Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development', which he explained as:

...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978:86).

Vygotsky is referring to the gap between what an individual child is able to perceive alone and what he or she can achieve with help from an adult or someone else who is more knowledgeable. He maintained that:

...learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement (Vygotsky, 1978:90).

While behavioural approaches seem to neglect the importance of interaction between adults, and children, or between peers, both Bruner and Vygotsky saw the individual and the environment as inseparable. However, they seemed to differ in their emphasis on the integration of the social world and individual development, the quantity of such interaction and the type of social partner. Bruner (1987) set the focus on the child as a social being, whose competence is interwoven with the competence of others. He emphasised how language interaction serves to 'scaffold' the child's efforts at expressing and understanding both events and utterances (Bruner and Haste, 1987:11). He particularly emphasised the actual competence of the child, which he believed was greater than scholars had conceived it to be. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the leading role of the more mature person, 'the knowledgeable other', 'the more skilled other', in relation to the zone of proximal development. Thus, through interaction adults may influence

children and children are influenced by each other. To reiterate Woods' assertion; the link between the individual and the environment is that of social meaning and it becomes meaningful through shared symbols, which involves that the world is socially constructed (Woods, 1983).

### **1.3 Interaction**

Evidently, interaction involves people communicating in a process of sending and receiving some kind of messages. Hargreaves (1975) refers to Asch (1952) who defines interaction as a means of mutual focus:

The paramount fact about social interaction is that the participants stand on common ground, that they turn *toward one another*, that their acts interpenetrate and therefore regulate each other... In full interaction each participant refers his action to the other and the other's action to himself. When two people, A and B, work jointly or converse, each includes in his view, simultaneously and in their relation, the following facts: (1) A perceives the surroundings, which include B and himself; (2) A perceives that B is also oriented to the surroundings, that B includes himself and A in the surroundings; (3) A acts toward B and notes that B is responding to his action; (4) A notes that B in responding to him sets up the expectation that A will grasp the response as an action of B directed toward A. The same ordering must exist in B (Hargreaves, 1975:70).

Here interaction is defined as reciprocal communication, each person reacts to the other and communicates, and the behaviour and reactions are to some instance determined by the other. They transmit symbols with a shared meaning. Delamont (1976: 27) claims that... "successful participation in joint acts depends on recognising them - that is, construing them 'correctly' or according to the other 'participants' definitions of the situation."

Hargreaves (1975:70-71) clarifies two different types of interaction. In *pseudo contingent interaction*, he explains, interactions appear to be contingent, because each person synchronises his speech so that it does not overlap with the speech of others. Each person waits for his or her cue and replies seem to be fixed. "In truly reciprocally contingent

interaction, each participant reacts to the other, and the behaviour of each is in part determined by the other” (Hargreaves, 1975:71). Hargreaves describes the other form of interaction, as *asymmetrically contingent*. This is when the behaviour of one participant is highly contingent on the other, but the behaviour of the second participant is only partially contingent on the other. An example of this form of interaction can be teacher-pupil interaction, where the teacher asks questions and all the pupils’ answers relate to her/his questions.

Hargreaves (1975) argues that in interaction we as participants have to make:

...some sort of a compromise between the response we might wish to make, our own personality, needs and goals, and the limitations on our creative response which accrue from social norms, from the role partner’s expectations and from the nature of his preceding behaviour (Hargreaves (1975:71).

Thus, interaction is a dynamic concept because each interaction forms part of a series of interconnected sets, such as context, messages, feedback, and results. The process of interaction takes place in context, the context can influence peoples’ behaviour, and certain environments might cause one to change intended behaviour or manner of interacting. Through interaction the individual may acquire the basis for co-operative and social activity.

### 1.3.1 Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionism derives from the philosopher Kant who was interested in understanding and unravelling the meanings of the world, created by human beings and the way man acted towards himself as a reflexive being (Sidell, 1989). His basic idea was that history, culture and even the concept of self were created by human beings, that individuals interpret their world and constantly act and respond to symbols and gestures through interaction with others. Kant maintained that man is a rational being because he is a social being. He emphasised



the universality of our judgements, which arises from the fact that humans derive their attitudes and perceptions from their entire community.

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) laid the foundations of the symbolic interactionist approach (Blumer, 1969:1). Mead is best known and remembered among social scientists for his theory of mind. He attempted to account for the origins and development of human intelligence by linking it to the process of evaluation, by presenting mind and conduct as inescapably linked (Hewitt, 1997). For Mead, one of the unique characteristics of human beings is their ability to change the course of evolution through the exercise of their intellectual capacities (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965:184). According to Mead (1934), the symbolic interactionist has a specific interest in how people interpret and categorise the world, and the ways in which, others influence this process, how people interpret and categorise others with whom they interact. From Mead's sociological viewpoint, the conscious mind, self-awareness and self-regulation are central, and he viewed human thought, experience and behaviour as basically social.

Herbert Blumer, Mead's follower, had a profound effect on social theory and methodology and was the originator of the term, 'symbolic interactionism'. Blumer (1969) draws out the three primary premises of the theory of symbolic interactionism. Firstly, human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them. Secondly, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. Thirdly, these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. Therefore the implications of symbolic interactionism are:

...the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning, which they attach to such actions (Sidell, 1989:265, citing Blumer, 1962).

Symbolic interactionism sees meaning arising in the process of interaction between people, which occurs through a process of interpretation (Blumer, 1969:4-5). Blumer (1966) argues that in non-symbolic interaction, human beings respond directly to one another's gestures or actions. On the other hand, in symbolic interaction they interpret each other gestures and 'act'<sup>5</sup> on the basis of the meaning yielded by the interpretation (Blumer, 1966:537). An unconscious response to a person's voice illustrates non-symbolic interaction, while interpreting the shaking of a head as indicating that a person is against your suggestion illustrates symbolic interaction. Thus, Blumer (1966) argues that symbolic interaction involves interpretation, or ascertaining the meaning of the actions or remarks of the other person, and definition, which involves the conveying of messages to the other person as to how he is to act. People thus interpret and act on the basis of meanings and understanding which they develop through interaction with others. The link between the individual and the environment is that of social meaning and it becomes meaningful through shared symbols (Woods, 1883). When people are interacting, they are constantly interpreting their own and other's acts and responding. The idea is that we perceive ourselves through others' eyes and in that way we gradually perceive the world. Each time we enter a new social situation or relationships we learn to behave by watching, asking and listening. Thus, behaviour is not only a response to the stimuli from another person. Actions are constructed

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'act' is defined as a functional unit of conduct with an identifiable beginning and end that is related to the organism's purposes and that is oriented toward one or ore object (Hewitt, 1997:43). "The objective of the acts is then found in the life-process of the group, not in those of the separate individuals alone" (Mead, 1934:7).

through shared symbols in a reciprocal interaction between people, where they use their senses, insight and thoughts. The central notion of symbolic interactionism is that all humans are constructors of their own actions and meanings; they are possessed of a 'self', and they are reflexive or self-interacting.

Mead "seeks to establish how 'mind' and 'self' arise within the context of social conduct and interaction" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:74). He saw mind, body and conduct as inseparable aspects of evolution that has produced a uniquely human life form (Hewitt, 1997:8). Only rational beings can give universal form to their acts and only they would be able to generalise their acts (Mead, 1934). Mead felt that human behaviour was far too complex to be explained by instinct (Hewitt, 1997). Actions are seen as having a social basis rather than deriving from instinct or genetics.

Human action, ...is not simply the stimulus response mechanism of Pavlov's dogs, but constant complicated interaction based on a shared understanding of the meaning of the symbols and gestures learnt through the process of socialisation (Sidell, 1989:264-265).

Mead (1934) found reason to criticise behaviourism, especially with regard to social behaviour. He thought it escaped from the concept of mind and paid too much attention to strictly observable behaviour, thereby evading mental events like thoughts, ideas, or images:

The social act is not explained by building it up out of stimulus plus response; it must be taken as a dynamic whole – as something going on – no part of which can be considered or understood by itself (Mead, 1934:7).

He maintained that most individual acts are a part of more complex, socially, co-ordinated activities involving several people. People seem to be guided not only by rewards but also by more general ideas of how their own conduct is expected to be fitted to the conduct of others (Hewitt, 1997).

Symbolic interactionists have based their analysis of human conduct on the concept of the symbol or as Mead called it the 'significant symbol.' A symbol is an invented sign, a thing or an event associated with some other thing or an event, but it is one that is produced and controlled by the very animals that have learned to respond to it. Human language is the most important and powerful set of symbols that is identified (Hewitt, 1997:32). Language is the defining characteristics of humans; this representational system is composed of sounds that stand for meaning and form a complex system that has both structure and function. A functional approach to language is interested in how people use language. Language can have multiple meanings, confused meanings, carries emotional implications and changes over time. Communication is its primary function and as such it is a social process (Ellis, 1999; Stubbs, 1983). Language is contextualised; it happens in real situations for real purposes. Interactionalists view culture, society and a child's psychological makeup and cognitive abilities as interdependent (Bainbridge and Malicky, 2000). Through language the individual learns about culture and about being an individual who is a part of this culture. These aspects cannot be separated; they are a part of each other, interacting and contributing to the unique development of the individual.

However, Hewitt (1997:33) clarifies that not all symbols take the form of spoken or written words, although language provides the key set of symbols. Non-verbal symbols such as facial expressions and hand gestures have symbolic import.

Mead (1934) said that each individual, in beginning an act, shows actions that are perceived by others and evoke responses. Many living creatures other than humans live in association with others of their own kind and depend on relations, but human interaction differs substantially from that of other animals. Contrary to animals, human beings respond by deciding or making up their minds (Hewitt, 1997). Mead (1934)

explained the concept gesture<sup>6</sup>, which comes after a symbol and serves as a stimulus to others in the earlier stages of social acts and can change the position of the act. Thus, gestures are a part of an act that is responsible for its influence upon other forms. Although Mead (1934:14) argues that conversations may be carried on which cannot be translated into articulate speech, Hewitt (1997:9) argues that the first and most important gestures are linguistics. Mead was the first to assert that both human nature and social order are products of communication (Hargreaves, 1975), which consist of language and symbolic communication. Mead (1934) assumed that language seemed to carry a set of symbols answering to certain content, which is measurably identical in the experience of different individuals. For Mead, it is the mechanism of language, which underlies the development of mind. He views the operation of the mind as the channel through which the individual can become the object<sup>7</sup> of his own thought (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This process is the basis for the development of the conscious self. Human beings are not only attuned to overt bodily movements of others, but also to a complex set of vocalisations that follows their acts and the others. These vocal gestures are according to Mead, significant symbols, which can create a certain attitude, a readiness to act in a certain way and an idea about how to behave or react according to this situation (Mead, 1934:61-68). The social act can be understood in terms of series of symbols to which individuals respond

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<sup>6</sup> Gestures are the basic mechanism whereby the social process goes on. Gestures facilitate appropriate social interaction. As a part of any given social act, gestures effect an adjustment to the actions of those involved thereby acting as a stimuli calling forth socially appropriate responses. "Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals" (Mead, 1934:47).

<sup>7</sup> Symbolic interactionists use Mead's concept of the term 'object' to figure out the way in which people perceive and act upon the environment. They (s.i.) view the concept more broadly from everyday meaning. We live in a world of objects – "of symbolically designated things, ideas, people, activities, and purposes ... people live in, pay attention to, and act toward a world of objects" (Hewitt, 1997:38). "An object represents a plan of action, it does not exist for the individual in some pre-established form. Perception of any object has telescoped in it a series of experiences which one would have if he carried out the plan of action toward the object" (Hewitt, 1997:41 summarising Mead's view of the object).

according to how they interpret various gestures. Such interpretation also affects later stages of an act.

Mead (1934) maintained that we are continually arousing in ourselves responses, which we call forth in other persons. By this, we are taking the attitudes of the other persons onto our own conduct (Mead, 1934:69). In this connection, vocal gestures, have an importance, which no other gestures have (Mead, 1934:65). Mead claimed that if communication is to take place, the symbol has to mean the same thing to all individuals involved. If a number of individuals respond in different ways to the stimulus, the stimulus means different things to them (Mead, 1934:54).

The significant symbol gives human beings a form of control over their own conduct, by anticipating what others will do in response to their acts, but also gives them a form of consciousness not found elsewhere: consciousness of self. Mead (1934) saw the 'self' as emerging from social interaction in which the individual takes the role of the 'other' and internalises the attitudes he perceives from others. This is reflected in the interaction of the individual's self-conception ('I') and the perceived view that others have of the individual ('Me'). Mead (1934) said that by reflecting continually on ourselves as others see us, we become competent in the production and display of social symbols. He argued that we owe our nature to the fact that we interact in terms of symbols. These symbols can also stand for an object or an event. Mead explains that such symbols indicate particular characteristics of a situation so that the response to them can be present to the individual (Mead, 1934:120-121). To take an example, a person is not afraid of a footprint of a bear but the symbol that refers to the bear makes the person react with fear.

Symbolic interactionism placed the concept of 'self' at the centre of social psychology, because it enables the construction of meaning to be controlled:

We can converse with our 'selves', we can stand outside our 'selves' and look inward with 'others'' eyes. This suggests two aspects of the self - the subjective 'I', the initiator of action, the part that perceives and constructs; and the more objective 'Me', the part of one self as others might see it, and as the 'I' by putting itself in the position of others, can also see it (Woods, 1983:2).

There is a continuous interaction between the 'I' and the 'Me'. The individual constructs, modifies, reconsiders and so on. In Mead's (1934) theory the concept 'taking the role of the other' is explained and also called identificatory role taking:

...the person takes to himself and makes his own the attitudes that the other - normally 'significant others' - takes to him. He adapts other's standpoint as his own; the attitudes of the other are transformed into self-attitudes. The other then becomes a source of a person's values, beliefs and standards. ...It is through identificatory role-taking that a person acquires an ideal self (Hargreaves, 1975:12).

Through taking the role of other, the self acquires its reflexive quality and attains self-consciousness. First one can see one's own behaviour from the view of specific others, but gradually over time, one relates significant features of these perceptions together, and sees oneself in terms of generalised and abstracted norms, values and beliefs (Woods, 1983). Of importance here is Woods' assertion that individuals can only develop complete selves to the degree that they are able to assume the attitude of the social group, of which they are members, towards the group's activities. Thus, the notion of self is not inborn, it is learned. In Mead's view the development of the consciousness of self is an essential part of the process of becoming a human being (1934). Pollard (1985) explains that, although the self is first developed in childhood, interactionists argue that it is continually refined in later life and that it provides a basis for thought and behaviour.

Hewitt (1997) claims that Mead's account of human behaviour, mind, and self is a significant milestone in human self-understanding. The theory clarifies human conduct in scientific terms on the basis of scientific observation as well as it admits inner experiences as capable of

observation. We are able to communicate our experiences and feelings by using significant symbols. Individuals may become aware of what is expected of them and will try to adjust their actions accordingly.

In the light of symbolic interactionism, humans are constructors of their own actions and meanings: “they are possessed of self” (Woods, 1983). The concept seems to be used to represent an essential quality of being a person with strong connections to others. Through taking the role of other, the self acquires its reflexive quality and attains self-consciousness. It is vital for social life and co-operative activities to learn to take the role of other (Woods, 1983). Thus, symbolic interaction provides the basis co-operative actions in society. Both teachers and pupils are concerned with their ‘selves’, and as Pollard and Tann (1993:24) put it, each individual has a unique sense of self and a degree and free will in acting and in developing understanding with others. People respond to each other to acquire understanding. Through language and gestures individuals express themselves and seem to choose the response called for by the social context. Different people might experience the same situation differently and interaction may take different forms.

#### ***1.4 Non-verbal Communication in the Classroom***

Cohen and Manion (1981) maintain that aspects of non-verbal communication are of considerable importance for teachers: First, non-verbal messages are seen as reflections of what people are really thinking or feeling. Second, a child’s ability to learn from a teacher depends on the sharing of systems of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication draws attention to features of human communication that are non-linguistic and often are overlooked as a part of the whole process. And finally, new approaches to communication are concerned with the ‘whole man’, communication is a process taking place within a framework of human relationships, but not only limited to an analysis of the source, content and reception of messages.



In symbolic interactionism the term perspective refers to a co-ordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situations (Woods, 1983). In the classroom, the teacher-pupil interaction is affected by various factors and through their perspective teachers and pupils construct their reality and understand situations. These factors could be teachers' cultural or educational backgrounds, former experience, age, gender, interests and personalities. The teacher can be unaware of some of these factors. Hall and Hall (1988) maintain that there can be the possibility that expectations are being conveyed non-verbally and expressed with the teacher being unaware of what he is doing. He might be ignoring some students or criticising others. In the same way teachers' and pupils' perceptions, expectations and attitudes are factors that can influence the interaction in the classroom. Therefore, teachers' sense of 'self' is particularly important, because of the way in which it influences their perspectives, strategies and actions (Hargreaves, 1975; Nias, 1989).

Then, it is also possible that a teacher interacts without being aware of it and also without wanting to. Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (Gamble and Gamble, 1993) identified four basic strategies people use when they try to avoid contact with someone. This can be by *rejecting* communication by making clear a lack of interest, and thereby people are likely to create a socially uncomfortable situation. Secondly a person might decide to operate only to the "law of least effort", that is to *accept* communication, but not really participate. Thirdly, it is possible to choose to invalidate or *disqualify* our own or others' message, by changing subjects or giving incomplete answers. And people can use several *symptoms* instead of words that imply that they do not want to interact with a particular person.

Gamble and Gamble (1993) maintain that the effect of interaction can be emotional, physical, cognitive, or any combination of these factors. This effect is not always visible or immediately observable. There is more to interaction than meets the eye, or the ear. In schools, teaching and

talking is very closely bound together, and teachers can to some extent be unaware of the complex details of the elements of interaction, which unfold constantly in front of them.

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity... And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful (Wittgenstein, 1951/1979).

Gamble and Gamble (1993) claim that the message is the content of the communication act and everything a sender or a receiver does or says is a potential message as long someone is there is to interpret the behaviour. These verbal and non-verbal messages we send are often determined in part by the verbal and non-verbal messages we receive through all our senses and are the cues we perceive in reaction to our communication as feedback.

Language is a symbol that facilitates interaction. In turn, interaction is probably predominantly associated with talk. However, non-verbal or bodily communication includes gestures, head movements, eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice and touch, what are all integral parts of peoples' personalities, and indicate how they perceive messages. Information of this type plays an important part in interaction (Nelson-Jones, 1982:217).

Nelson-Jones argues that silence is also an important part of non-verbal communication, as it gives people permission and psychological space to reveal their thought and feelings (Nelson-Jones, 1982). Hall and Hall (1988) suggest the impact of non-verbal communication is potentially much greater than that of verbal communication and the ability to understand these subtle cues in interpersonal relations is of great importance and can be sent through many different channels. They point out that the areas of non-verbal communication which have been the focus of research are facial expression, eye contact, gesture, bodily movement, posture, proximity, touch, paralanguage (cues contained in

the way the voice is used) and bodily tension. However, Hall and Hall (1988:57) argue that the nature and impact of non-verbal communication in the classroom is still poorly understood and unavailable to the external observer. Shertzer and Stone (1980) argue that it is unknown whether gestures have common or unique meaning and under what conditions interpretations of non-verbal behaviour can be generalised. Non-verbal behaviour and the many messages communicated through it, can have a complex impact, it can invite trust, prompt pupils to open up and explore, or it can promote their distrust and lead to a reluctance (Egan, 1985; Shertzer and Stone, 1980).

#### 1.4.1 Body Messages

Egan (1985) maintains that, “people want more than physical presence in human communication; they want the other person to be fully there, meaning psychological or social-emotional presence” (Egan, 1985). However, either intentionally or unintentionally teachers may send messages that create distance (Nelson-Jones, 1993). For example, teachers may physically edge away from pupils who wish to discuss personal concerns. A teacher can be near the pupils physically and at the same time be available, but he can also be near a pupil without being available. This finds expression in the teacher’s body messages. On the other hand, a teacher can be available, although he is physically at a distance. The way one orientates oneself physically and psychologically in relation to others is decisive in both instances.

In 1967, Argyle estimated that in group communication, people spend 30-60 per cent of the time exchanging mutual glances with other people and females give more eye contact than men (Tubbs, 1995). Strongman and Champness (1968) found that people are able to assert dominance over others almost exclusively with eye contact, and tend to direct their comments towards those who they presume to be perceptive to feedback (Tubbs, 1995:190). This is supported by McCroskey, Larson and Knapp (1971) who found that people make direct eye contact when they indicate

that they are open for communication, and Exline (1963) found that people use eye contact to decrease distance psychologically and also to show hostility (Wilson and Hanna, 1993:105). Body movements may also indicate attitudes. Reece and Witeman (1962) found that people showing warmth changed body posture, smiled, eye contact became direct and hand remained still, while a cold person looked around the room, drummed fingers and did not smile (Cohen and Manion, 1981:192). Egan (1985) maintains that the quality of ones' approach to other people (attending), both physical and psychological, influences the quality of one's perceptiveness. Furthermore, he claims that attending is now considered to be a basic and important helping skill.

Studying bodily movements, Johnson, Ekman and Friesen (1975) found that they mostly indicate interpersonal directions or commands, but also the physical or emotional state of a person who is signalling; insults; replies; and physical appearance (Cohen and Manion, 1981:190). On the other hand, Argyle (1975) identified several ways in which bodily movements support verbal communication. Some of these are: emphasising, providing further information about what is said, illustrating, providing feedback, and signalling attention (Cohen and Manion, 1981:190). A relaxed body posture contributes to the message that one is receptive (Nelson-Jones, 1993). If a teacher is tense and uptight, the pupils may consciously or intuitively feel that he/she is not accessible to them. Such a situation may also create tension in the classroom. Egan (1985) says that being relaxed means becoming comfortable with using one's own body as a vehicle of contact and expression. This may mean that when a teacher is relaxed, it will help him/her to focus the attention on the pupils.

Facial expression and eye contact are considered to be the most important areas for non-verbal communication. Argyle (1975) claims that facial expression may be used in three different ways: As an indicator of personality characteristic, as an expression of emotion, indicated by slow-moving patterns of expressions; interpersonal attitudes

are expressed similarly and as interaction signals and signals linked with speech. These signals are different from emotional expression and involve only parts of the face (Cohen and Manion, 1981:194).

Wilson and Hanna (1993) maintain that eye contact signals information seeking, openness to communication, concealment or exhibitionism, recognition of social relationship, and conflicts in motivation. Eye contact means meeting the eyes of the other person (Nelson-Jones, 1993). Nelson-Jones (1993) claims that looking at people in the area of their faces is a way both to show interest and to receive facial messages. He refers to Henley (1977) and Argyle (1983) and says that women are usually more attentive than men to all measures of gaze. Furthermore, he says that gaze can give cues about when to stop listening and start responding. Good eye contact entails arriving at a comfortable level of contact for each person. Staring can be threatening, people can feel intimidated or under pressure. On the other hand, looking down or away may indicate that the person is tense or bored. Looking away frequently may be a clue to a reluctance to be involved in communication with another person, although obviously looking away occasionally is normal (Egan, 1985:77; Nelson-Jones, 1993:94).

Another type of body message is physical openness, which involves facing the person one is interacting with, with both face and body (Nelson-Jones, 1993). This may mean that both the teacher and the pupil can receive all of each other's significant facial and bodily messages. Turning one's body away from the person one is interacting with can lessen the degree of contact with that person. Egan (1985) argues that what is important in facing a person is that the bodily orientation one adopts conveys the message that one is involved with another person. Leaning means a kind of body flexibility or responsiveness that enhances communication between people (Egan, 1985:76). Nelson-Jones (1993) argues that if a person leans too far forward, the person he/she is interacting with may perceive it as an invasion of their personal space. In the same way leaning too far back may be felt as distancing. Egan

(1985) points out that leaning too far forward may be perceived as a demand for some kind of closeness or intimacy.

Showing pupils concern may include touching pupils hands, arms or shoulder. Use of touch may often be appropriate, but a teacher needs to take care that it is not an unwanted invasion of personal space. Touch is an area in which teachers need to use great caution. Nelson-Jones (1993) argues that the intensity and duration of touch should be sufficient to establish contact yet avoid discomfort or any hint of sexual interest. Argyle (1975) investigated how touch communicates interpersonal attitudes, feelings and emotions. He suggests that touching signals may be interpreted as managing the interaction itself. Such signals may guide pupils without interrupting verbal communication. However, many such signals are accidental and therefore meaningless (Cohen and Manion, 1981).

Acceptance appears not only in verbal interaction, but is also reflected in teachers' non-verbal behaviour. Meeting special needs is about responding to individuals, understanding their needs and recognising the validity of what they bring to a new situation. It also means an acceptance of pupils' individuality. "A particular aspect of the way teachers perceive their pupils is raised by the presence of children who have significant impairments and disabilities" (Ainscow and Muncey, 1987:111). To be accepted is the prerequisite of perceiving one self as an independent person. Dalen (1994) maintains that acceptance is a concept that refers to the whole person in the interaction process. She claims that a child with disabilities can easily feel different and therefore it may probably be in more need for this acceptance from adults than other children are. She argues that what seems to be especially important are aspects such as listening skills, and understanding the meaning behind the child's actions to be able to communicate in such a way that the child feels accepted and acknowledged (Dalen, 1994:74).

### 1.4.2 Voice Messages

The voice is an important channel for non-verbal communication. Argyle (1975) identified two types of vocal cues. There may be various aspects of voice quality, unrelated to the contents of speech such as tone of voice, which communicates emotions and attitudes, and type of voice and accent, which send information about personality and group membership. The other aspect is vocal features which are more related to speech. This may involve pitch, stress and timing, for instance (Cohen and Manion, 1981:194). Davitz (1964) found that vocal expressions were associated with different emotional stability. His study showed for instance that high, fast or irregular voice was connected with intensity, and low, regular, soft voice related affection (Cohen and Manion, 1981). According to Nelson-Jones, the most common error teachers make is speaking too quickly and too softly, which he claims can indicate anxiety. Speech rate depends both on how quickly words are spoken and also on the frequency and duration of pauses between them. A rapid speech rate can cause anxiety rather than calming pupils down. Uses of pauses and silences can enhance the teacher's capacity to be a rewarding listener (Nelson-Jones, 1993:96).

The volume of the teacher's voice needs to be at a level that is comfortable and easy to hear (Nelson-Jones, 1993). A booming voice can be overwhelming and a voice that is too quiet may appear to be weak. Teachers may speak with adequate loudness, but can still be difficult to understand. Articulation refers to the distinctness and clarity of speech (Nelson-Jones, 1993). Articulation also needs to be clear. Teachers may have nasal or throaty voices and therefore not enunciate words clearly.

Voice messages can exert great influence on the atmosphere in a classroom, and the interaction between the teacher and the pupils. Nelson-Jones (1993) maintains that the voice can speak volumes about what one truly feels and how emotionally responsive one is to others'

feelings. He argues that voice messages always accompany verbal responses. As such they are an integral part of rewarding listening.

### 1.4.3 Listening

Pollard and Tann (1993) describe different types of listening situations that can be identified within the classroom, and serve specific purposes and imposes particular demands. They categorise these listening situations in four groups, of which two are:

*Interactive listening*: the role of a speaker and listener changes rapidly. The participants need to exercise 'bidding' skills. Some individuals will find it hard to participate while other does not consider others' need for participating and therefore might not 'let others in'.

*Reflective listening*: where listeners follow an exposition. In both, interactive and reflective listening, the emphasis is on following the meaning of the speakers.

Different types of listening make various demands upon both teachers and children (Pollard and Tann, 1993:234-235). Gamble and Gamble (1993) explain that listening is a deliberate process in which we seek to understand and maintain aural stimuli. An active, empathetic listener puts himself in the speaker's place in an effort to understand his feelings. This listener appreciates both meaning and the feeling behind of what is said, and he reflects, and considers. Unlike hearing, listening depends on a complex set of acquired skills. The prerequisite for effective listening is effective feedback, which consists of both verbal and non-verbal messages (Gamble and Gamble, 1993:166-170), and as such is based on the ability to show empathetic behaviour.

### 1.4.4 Empathy

One of the founders of humanistic psychology, Carl Rogers (1980), is well known for his commitment to the interpersonal dimension of learning and teaching. He showed the importance of a problem-solving



attitude to learning, which along with authentic contact with 'self', he said was a prerequisite for real learning. He was committed to the importance of caring on the part of the teacher and the atmosphere of trust in the classroom. He found that when certain measures are applied in teaching, an ease of interaction is facilitated. These measures are empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. He believed that there had been given too little consideration to the aspect of interpersonal relations called 'empathic', an element that is extremely important both for the understanding of personality dynamics and for effective changes in personality and behaviour. Barrett-Lennard (1962) has defined empathy:

Qualitatively empathetic understanding is an active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person, of reaching out to receive his communication and meaning, and of translating his words and signs into experienced meaning that matches at least those aspects of his awareness that are most important to him at the moment. It is an experiencing of the consciousness 'behind' another's outward communication, but with continuous awareness that this consciousness is originating and proceeding in the other (Rogers, 1980:143-144, citing Barrett-Lennard, 1962).

The non-verbal communication, the subtle interpersonal interaction, the dynamic complexity of teacher-pupil interaction may be revealed in the teachers' empathic behaviour and body messages. Not every teacher is capable of establishing true empathetic understanding with pupils. However, Thompson and Rudolph (1992:88) state that children to a greater degree than adults are sensitive to the real feelings and attitudes of others. Furthermore, non-verbal messages may be the most important clue to what a child is really feeling and trying to communicate. Rogers (1994) explains that empathetic understanding is sharply different from evaluative understanding. He maintains that when a teacher has the ability to understand pupils' reactions from inside, has a sensitive awareness of pupils' needs, is receptive and understands how the pupil perceives the learning, the likelihood of significant learning is increased

(Rogers and Freiberg, 1994:157). Therefore, learning is facilitated when pupils are understood rather than evaluated or judged.

Hall and Hall (1988) point out that concepts like 'empathy' are difficult to define, and Rogers' early work was criticised on the ground that there was no hard evidence to support his ideas about empathetic behaviour. In his later work, Rogers (1980) provides evidence by series of case histories, and the review of the work of Aspy and Roebuck (1975) about the effectiveness of empathy. Several studies have been conducted on the relationship of empathy to social and cognitive development. Thompson and Rudolph (1992) summarise a variety of these studies (Shantz, 1975 and 1983; Rogers, 1967; Robinson and Hyman, 1984). They conclude that children have empathy for other children more readily than they do for adults, the reliable accuracy in judging emotions usually appear in middle childhood, and empathetic understanding is associated with involvement. Moreover, training in human relations theories produce positive changes in teachers' attitudes and corresponding changes in improved classroom learning climates (Thompson and Rudolph, 1992:100-102).

### ***1.5 Teachers' Role in the Classroom***

The term 'role' is widely used in social sciences but the term is difficult to grasp as it is defined differently (Hewitt, 1997). Conventionally the term is defined as a cluster of duties, rights, and obligations associated with a particular social position. The symbolic interactionists' definition of the term is not fixed to a list of duties. Instead it emphasise people's pragmatic and creative capacities rather than their tendencies to follow a schedule of conduct. They define 'role' as a perspective from which conduct is constructed, a more abstract perspective from which the individual participates in a social situation and contributes to its social acts and social object (p. 18). People do not only accept roles, but cognitively structure situations into roles, they look for order and meaning in the situations where they find themselves and others (Hewitt,

1997:58-60). Thus, a role provides perspectives from which we perceive and understand others' and our own conduct. This relates to transactional models of learning in which the teacher's role is to create circumstances that help pupils to integrate their capacities and interpretations with those of significant others around them. This is because "learning involves the sharing and testing of intersubjective meanings and the negotiation of interpretations through interaction and the exercise of empathy (taking the role of other)" (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:116).

Kyriacou (1991) explains three essential teaching skills, on behalf of the teacher. Firstly, a teacher needs to have *knowledge*, about a subject, pupils, curriculum, teaching methods, the influence on teaching and learning of other factors, and knowledge about one's own teaching skills. The second fundamental skill he reports is *decision-making*, which involves to structure, to think and make decisions before, during and after a lesson, as well as knowing how best to achieve educational outcomes. Lastly, specified by Kyriacou is *action*, which comprises the overt behaviour by teachers, undertaken to foster pupil learning (Kyriacou, 1991:5). By the final factor, Kyriacou emphasises that teachers' behaviour may influence pupils' learning. Furthermore, he highlights teachers' knowledge about own behaviour. Woods (1983) maintains that to understand teachers' actions we need to examine its basics constitutions in perspectives. This involves how teachers define their tasks, how they view pupils, what they mean by good and bad when considering pupils and their work, and their views on how to teach. He accounts for two contrasting paradigms, which involve different assumptions and lead to completely different realities for teachers and pupils. Firstly, the psychometric paradigm rests on the assumption that knowledge is objective and the teacher's role, is to fit the knowledge into the child and to provide the means to do so. The idea is that the child has a moral responsibility to take in the knowledge, but is socially irresponsible. Such ideology leads to control, discipline, measurement and testing on behalf of the teacher. The phenomenological paradigm,

on the other hand, sees learning as a growth process, knowledge is constructed, and the child is believed to have an unlimited capacity. The teacher's role is to discover children's possibilities, to understand how they learn and to foster their development (Woods, 1983:42-43). Teachers' perspectives influence how they relate to such models and may have considerable effect on teaching. Studies by Berlaks (Woods, 1983) show that teachers seem to bring various perspectives into play in the same context, according to a wide range of factors, advancing a broad decision making front. Thus, teachers' seem to adapt their perspectives to the situation at a given time, and to make various decisions to accomplish the aims of teaching. Recalling Mead (1934), people act as they do on the basis of the circumstances as they define them. They act as they do out of their beliefs and understanding (Cuff and Payne, 1979). Thus, teachers' perspectives may influence pupils. The pupils in the classroom are the teacher's reality, and both teachers and pupils are objects in their environment. They are not only aware of things and other people that make up their environment; they also have an awareness of themselves in the environment, or self-consciousness.

Bruner (1977) argues that the teacher is a model, he or she is a personal symbol of the educational process, a figure with whom the pupils can identify with and compare themselves to (Bruner, 1977:88-90). Hirst and Peters (1991) explain that in the situation or context in which teachers work, much of their behaviour can be defined as a 'role-relationship'. This sort of a relationship is characterised by social role-play where the teacher occupies a position of authority. The role is well defined and has its limits and duties. Without exercising these rights and duties, the task of teaching would be impossible. The role-relationship between teachers and pupils is limited to those essential contacts required for the performance of duties for which the classroom was created, i.e. teaching and learning. This type of relationship is characterised by impersonal interaction. There will be little or no interaction for the individuals as persons other than that which is necessary for the teaching and learning to occur. The class is role-governed and there is probably

no breathing space to consider individual needs and interests. The focus is on subjects rather than on a person. Moreover, criticism of work or on bad behaviour becomes easier as no emotions are involved. The teachers do neither like or dislike pupils. In such a role-governed classroom the atmosphere may be impersonal and cold due to the fact that people neither give or receive in this type of interaction.

On the other hand, Hirst and Peters (1991) explain that a general *personal relationship* is defined as an interaction that grows up between the people concerned, and in which there is an element of reciprocity. This type of relationship arises neither from an impersonal order, nor from roles of convention or of morality, but from the initiative of the individuals concerned. The characteristics of this general personal relationship are that it involves reciprocal knowledge of private matters, both partners share interests, reactions and experience. A teacher would not enter into a personal relationship with pupils, in a sense of personal relationship, as explored by Hirst and Peters.

*Embryonic personal relationship* is what Hirst and Peters (1991) call personal relationships in teaching when the teacher allows herself or himself to be a receptive human being and relate to the pupils as well as being a teacher. When it is advocated that teachers-pupil relationship should be personal, it is not suggested that everyone enter into a full personal relationship. Some of the general personal relationship is adopted in addition to the role-relationship and thereby as Hamm (1989) explains, it is a kind of a balance between the two extremes. Hirst and Peters (1991:101-102) argue that embryonic personal relationships can help. They may rid the atmosphere of unnecessary tension that is created in the classroom where the teacher is too uncertain to convey the feeling to pupils that they are meeting a living human being, as well as a teacher.

By embryonic personal relationship, as defined by Hirst and Peters (1991), the teacher gets to know the pupils individual needs better. Showing her or his personality, the teacher can be a motivating device

for students. In addition, Hamm (1989) points out that when pupils observe the teacher overcoming difficulties, frustration and weariness, they are more likely to do so as well; for modelling is a more effective pedagogical technique when mutual respect is evident.

Embryonic personal relationship is seen as a necessary precondition of teaching today (Hirst and Peter, 1991). The teacher's role in the classroom involves interaction that does not necessarily relate directly to teaching, but must include consideration of pupils' self-respect and aspirations, and their feelings and sensitivities. Such interactional situations may be an important part of teaching and the learning process itself.

Interaction between adults and pupils, and between peers, is likely to be an important link in the passage to learning as described e.g. by The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors, 1996), where the more knowledgeable and skilled adult assists the child in "*learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together, and learning to be.*" Tudge and Rogoff (1989) suggest that shared thinking involving co-ordination of joint activity is central to the benefits of social interaction. They discuss how social interaction facilitates development under certain circumstances. They think that one of the most important aspects of this seems to be the possibility for participants to understand one another's perspective or participate in a more advanced skill, either through active observation or through joint involvement in problem solving (Tudge and Rogoff, 1989:17). Social interaction seems to have profound influence on how children and adults can perceive and interpret the world around them as will be discussed in the following section on interaction.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

To acquire the instruments of understanding; to be able to act creatively on one's environment; and to be able to participate and co-operate with

other people in all human activities are three fundamental aims of education as stated by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century. The fourth and essential aim, which precedes from the previous three, is that in schools pupils learn to be (Delors, 1996). These are extensive objectives and therefore it is evident that the teachers can not only regard pupils as recipient of knowledge and skills. Pupils also need to exercise their social skills. Successful interaction in the classroom, therefore, seems to be essential.

B.F. Skinner (Gagné, 1977) based his version of behaviourism upon the idea that learning is a function of change in overt behaviour. Bruner and Vygotsky saw the individual and the environment as inseparable. Vygotsky (John-Steiner and Sauberman, 1978) heightened the leading role of the more mature person, 'the more skilled other' while Bruner (1990) maintains that learning is a meaning making activity and he sees this process as being created and negotiated mutually between people. These approaches emphasise pupils' social development and Pollard (1997) claims that they are in contrast to behaviourism, which places the learner in a passive role. The behaviourist model seems to underestimate the importance of pupils understanding and ignores the part teachers and peers play in pupils' social development.

Following the symbolic interactionist approach, human beings act according to the way they see and construct the world around them. People act according to their perception and choices, of interconnected sets, such as context, messages, feedback and result and they reciprocate accordingly. From Mead's (1934) sociological viewpoint, the conscious mind, self-awareness and self-regulation are central and he viewed human thought, experience and behaviour as basically social. People interpret each other's actions and do not only react to actions but also their response to each other's actions is based on the meaning they define or interpret into such actions (Blumer, 1966 and 1969). Communication becomes meaningful through shared significant symbols. People constantly reflect upon one another's messages, these messages can be

verbal or non-verbal. The self is constructed through communication and social activity and becomes possible through the process of role taking (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). This social interaction may include understanding context, i.e. shared experience which is relevant to each participant; understanding turn taking, along with body and facial gestures and the ability to express ideas as they occur and give feedback. Through taking the role of the other, the self acquires its reflexive quality and attains self-consciousness (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). This process is regarded vital for social life and co-operative activity (Woods, 1983).

Thus, the teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom may be affected by various factors and it is the teacher who is responsible for making this interaction work in the teaching learning process that takes place in the classroom. Bruner (1977) argues that the teacher is a model, he or she is a personal symbol of the educational process, a figure with whom the pupils can identify with and compare themselves to (Bruner, 1977:88-90). Cohen and Manion (1981) maintain that aspects of non-verbal communication are of considerable importance for teachers: First, non-verbal messages are seen as reflections of what people are really thinking or feeling. Second, a child's ability to learn from a teacher depends on the sharing of systems of non-verbal communication.

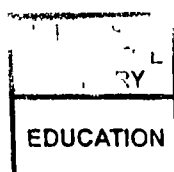
Language is a symbol that facilitates interaction and interaction is probably predominantly associated with talk. However, non-verbal or bodily communication can play an important part in interaction (Nelson-Jones, 1982:217). Such behaviour that finds expression in the teacher's body messages and voice messages can have great influence on the atmosphere in a classroom, and the interaction between the teacher and the pupils (Hirst and Peter, 1991; Nelson-Jones, 1993). Rogers (1980) claimed that when certain measures are applied in teaching an ease of interaction is facilitated. These measures are empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. This subtle interpersonal interaction, the dynamic complexity of teacher-pupil interaction may be revealed in the



teachers' empathic behaviour (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). Rogers emphasises that when a teacher is able to understand pupils' from inside, has sensitive awareness for pupils, is receptive and understands how children learn, the likelihood of significant learning is increased (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). Thus, interaction between adults and pupils, and between peers, is likely to be an important link in the passage to learning as described e.g. by The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors, 1996). Where the more knowledgeable and skilled adult assists the child in "*learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together, and learning to be.*"

The following questions are meant to explore teachers' interaction with pupils in the classroom; the interpersonal relations that seem to be of such great importance for both learning and social development.

1. What messages do teachers convey through their non-verbal behaviour? Is the teacher able to show empathic behaviour through her/his body and voice messages and be receptive and sensitive to pupils' individual needs? What is the meaning pupils may read or interpret from teachers' actions?
2. What is the nature of the teachers' leading role in the classroom? Is instruction in the classroom designed in a way that is likely to enhance pupils learning? Is there harmony in the classroom, does the teacher manage to maintain the pupils interest, and willingness to learn?
3. Is there a difference between the messages given by teachers in small and large schools? Is classroom interaction different in small and large school?



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **TEACHER-PUPIL INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM**

#### ***2.1 Introduction***

Much of pupils' learning in the classroom is rooted in some kind of interaction with teachers. This interaction occurs while teachers are teaching, listening, supporting pupils or holding personal conversations. This process occurs while pupils are working on tasks, individually or in groups, or when many incidental exchanges may be taking place.

Although this interaction depends heavily on the spoken word, it also relies on non-verbal interaction, gesture, facial expression, listening and voice, for instance. In other words, interaction is both transactional and symbolic. It is transactional in the sense that the teacher modifies his/her behaviour by the responses or feedback he or she receives from pupils.

The ideas of symbolic interactionism may also be applied to classrooms where meanings are continually being constructed and the teacher is in the role of the 'significant other'. As such, a number of effects seem to influence pupils through the teacher. These do not only bear upon learning, but are also implicated in the development of children's ability for 'self-regulation' and help to form the child's emerging concept of 'self-learner' (Wood, 1989:59). The effect of this subtle interaction between the teacher and pupils is an issue worth considering to understand better pupils' learning and motivation. It is also interesting to study how teachers' perception may influence this interaction.

The issue of how interaction may benefit all pupils in the classroom gives rise to a number of pressing questions. It may be suggested that the teacher must understand the individual, this unique being who is confronting the teacher and waiting to be educated and cared for.

The core of this chapter is to explore the interaction between the 'significant other' and the children in the classroom, the developing

children who are dependent upon the more knowledgeable adult. In most classrooms there are children with difficulties who may be experiencing more problems than most of the other children. These children are said to have 'special educational needs'. The perception that some children are normal and other are deficient has been the traditional way of viewing children. It has resulted in labelling children in several categories. The negative effect of labelling has been discussed widely in educational circles and literature in the last decades. It may be argued that labelling can have an influence on teachers' perspectives towards children and thereby on teacher-pupil interaction.

In the last two decades, educators have been preoccupied with reviewing concepts within special education in order to understand the issue more thoroughly. This has resulted in changes in policy and provisions for children with special educational needs. The shift in use of concepts within special education reflects the attitudinal changes towards children with disabilities. Moreover, it highlights how perspectives or attitudes are an integral part and a turning point in how their individual needs may be met through interaction with teachers and peers.

To approach the above issues, research on interaction in the classroom will first be examined. This interaction may affect children in different ways. Children with disabilities may need expanded individual attention and teaching approaches adapted to their individual needs. Therefore the meaning of the terms 'special needs' and 'individuality' will be considered as well as how these concepts may relate to teachers' perspectives and interaction with pupils. Finally, there is a discussion of how individual needs can be met in the classroom.

## **2.2 Research on Teacher/Pupil Interaction**

### **2.2.1 Transactional Interaction**

Several research studies have provided evidence on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom. They can clarify various aspects of such interaction, such as teachers' preferences; teachers' perception of pupils; and how the quality of interaction may facilitate learning generally and specifically the learning of pupils with disabilities.

In 1996, Cooper and McIntyre carried out research that enabled teachers and pupils to articulate their understanding on interaction in the classroom.<sup>8</sup> Interaction and its influence on learning were examined through interviews as well as by participant observation in classrooms. In order to observe the class activity as an ongoing process, the authors focussed on sequences of lessons, which made up curriculum 'units'.<sup>9</sup> They questioned the way in which teachers allow pupils' interests, preferences, and ideas to shape their teaching. They also examined teachers' perceptions of this interaction. In addition, the authors examined whether pupils were able to influence teachers' activities and if so, how and in what circumstances.

Cooper and McIntyre (1996) found that factors connected with pupils' moods, attitudes and interests are the most prominent kinds of circumstantial factors, to which teachers attend. Teachers found it desirable to be open to pupils' influences and to incorporate these influences in their teaching. Some of the outcomes sought by teachers tended to relate to the affective realm, rather than the cognitive, in that they represented a need to create an atmosphere in the classroom that considered pupils feelings or orientation. This was found to motivate pupils to engage actively in the learning process and to co-operate with

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<sup>8</sup> Altogether 325 pupils were in the classes studied of which 288 were interviewed (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:27).

<sup>9</sup> A 'unit' was defined as a consecutive series of lessons, involving about four (or more) hours work (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:28).

others. Moreover, the authors found that pupils influenced teachers, and they expressed their interests, concerns and preferences in different ways, depending on the circumstances of each lesson. Teachers used pupils' prior knowledge and understanding as a basis for decision-making, particularly when teaching younger children. It also emerged that teachers, in some instances, completely changed their working plans in response to pupils' requests. Pupils' requests were even related to certain teaching styles:

Where pupils were part of the focus for learning activities, pupils were able to recall lesson content with considerable vividness. In these circumstances pupils recalled the experience of the lesson in terms of their personal involvement (Cooper and McIntyre 1996:115).

These findings are in an agreement with Bruner's (1987) model of learning as a transactional process. Children are not isolated beings, working alone at their problem solving, constructing hypothesis upon the world. Rather, given an appropriate, shared, social context, children seem more competent as intelligent social actors than they are as individuals (Bruner, 1987; Bruner and Haste, 1987). Research carried out by other scholars indicated different results, which will be examined in the following section.

### 2.2.2 Individualised Interaction

The quality of teacher-pupil interaction has been widely examined and the question put forward whether teachers should try to interact with most of the children in one lesson or if they should interact more closely with fewer pupils in every lesson. Alexander (1992)<sup>10</sup> maintains that

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander and his colleagues at Leeds University in the UK, carried out an extensive evaluation of practices in primary schools, (Primary Education in Leeds, PNP) in 1986-1989, using four main methods for data collection: questionnaires, interviews, observation, and existing documentary and test material. The primary aim of the project was to meet the identified needs of all children, and in particular those children experiencing learning difficulties (Alexander, 1992:137). Among the themes identified for evaluation were: Children's needs: definition, identification, diagnosis and provision and classroom practice (Alexander, 1992:144). The project was carried out in 230 primary schools in Leeds, UK.

teachers need to look at both the frequency and the proportion of their interactions when considering the quality of their interactions. He argues that quantitative and qualitative analysis carried out on classroom practices showed that teacher-pupil interaction plays a vital part in children's learning (Alexander, 1992:144). However, this is in contrast with another finding put forth in Alexander's study, which indicates that teachers are not aware of how interaction may influence learning. Teachers often spent their time on activities that are of little use for pupils and much time was wasted while pupils were waiting for the teacher's attention. Teachers spent a large proportion of their time in class interacting with pupils, but these are mainly routine interactions, or two-thirds of the total interaction in the class. One-to-one teacher-pupil interaction was brief (three every minute) and for most children this type of interaction occurred infrequently. It was observed that certain children in a class, the most able, the oldest, the best behaved and the girls, were undemanding and were consequently left alone for long periods of time.

The lack of teacher' interaction with their pupils is expressed by Alexander:

...the more accessible teachers seek to make themselves to all their pupils as individuals, the less time they have for direct, extended and challenging interaction with any of them; but the more time they devote to such extended interaction with some children, the less demanding on them as teachers must be the activities they give to the rest; and the less demanding an activity is of their time and attention as teachers, the more the likelihood that the activity in question will demand little of the child (Alexander, 1992:66).

The findings showed by Alexander present a picture of intensely busy teachers who emphasise approaching many pupils in each lesson but one child at a time. This type of individualised interaction has also been found in other studies. Galton and his colleagues (1989) carried out an

extensive observational study (ORACLE)<sup>11</sup> in the UK, on teacher-pupil interaction in classrooms. The study showed that primary teachers were involved in interaction with pupils nearly 80% of the time they were observed, of which 70% of the interaction was with individual children, 20% with the whole class and under 10% with groups.

A third study, worth considering in connection to this discussion, was carried out by Croll and Moses in 1985. This was a structural observation, which was a part of research into special education.<sup>12</sup> This study also showed the predominance of individual interactions although not to the same extent as in the ORACLE study. Just over half of teachers' interactions was with individual pupils while just under a third was directed to whole class teaching, and just under a fifth was directed to whole class and groups (Croll and Hastings, 1997). The findings of the study showed that teachers were more occupied with children with special educational needs than other pupils, although the time spent on giving individual attention to both these groups of children was small. Children with special educational needs (learning difficulties and behaviour problems) received private individual attention 4.1 per cent of the time, compared with 2.5 per cent of the control group. This higher level of individual attention was achieved by attending to the children with special educational needs by private interaction and by taking them out of the class during lessons (Croll and Moses, 1985:128-130).

The above studies show a high rate of brief interactions in the classroom, predominantly on individual basis. It may be argued that the more teachers seek to make themselves available to all pupils as individuals, the less time they have for direct and structured interaction with each child. This type of interaction may also relate to the teaching approach

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<sup>11</sup> ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) was a longitudinal study, conducted on junior age classes. The sample involved 19 schools in three boroughs. The duration of the study was two years, 58 classes were studied in the first year and a further 40 in the second year (Galton, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> The sample included 32 junior age classrooms (Galton, 1989).

chosen. Fergusson (1994) maintains that the first part in developing communicative roles in the classroom is enabling pupils to be more actively involved, being sensitive to their needs and offering them support. The author argues that behavioural approaches are by nature adult-directed. These approaches emphasise one-to-one teaching programme and ignore group work and development of collaborative learning. Such approaches prevent the development of necessary skills in interaction (Fergusson, 1994:86-87). When discussing the design and implementation of a curriculum in special needs teaching, Norwich (1990) maintains that behavioural approaches are overly simplistic, yet they have been influential in the field. Behavioural approaches constrain the freedom of creativity and unforeseen learning opportunities in the classroom. Their technical nature can cast the teacher in the role of technician rather than a professional.

This gives rise to questions concerning how less one to one teacher-pupil interaction might lead to closer interaction and more constructive teaching. Shelley (1994)<sup>13</sup> found that one-to-one tutorial on a daily basis was difficult to manage in a typical classroom. The author suggests that other instructional adaptations and new skills in interacting with children might be needed. Social support is needed in the classroom in the form of more capable peers and teacher scaffolding. Thus, it is argued that methods that foster self-improving systems and requires students to become interdependent before coming independent could change the interaction pattern. Learning to teach within the student's zone of proximal development enables a teacher to determine with some confidence what type of a task will be challenging enough and when each scaffolding behaviour may be appropriate (Shelley, 1994:23). These suggestions relate to psychological theories that have had a great effect on instruction generally and particularly on diagnosis and

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<sup>13</sup> The study used a sociocultural framework to generalise principles about working within an emergent reader's zone of proximal development, and analysed teacher support and forms of teacher prompts in one-on-one tutorial, with pupils at risk of reading failure (Shelley, 1994).



instruction of children with learning difficulties. Brown (1985) found that by scaffolding functions, teachers could help to bridge gaps, by activating problem solving in the child. The underlying philosophy for this successful form of instruction is 'expert scaffolding.'

Expert scaffolding involves the gradual transfer of strategic control from experts to novices in such a way that the novices can practice within their gradually expanding range of competence, taking charge of their own learning in the process (Brown, 1985:2).

Scaffolding instruction is symbolic expression; parallel because a scaffold is an apparatus that one can shape, yet is used temporarily. One example of expert scaffolding in the classroom is reciprocal teaching (Osborn, 1986:8), which is based on certain teacher-pupil interaction and interaction between peers.

To sum, although some findings show that pupils are involved in constructive interaction, it is apparent that in some classrooms pupils are involved in very brief interaction with teachers. Teachers seem to divide their time among individuals around the classroom, which does not necessarily mean that individual needs are met. Others approaches might be needed and teachers' might need to be aware of how their perceptions and beliefs may influence pupils.

### ***2.3 Teachers' Perception of Pupils***

...if teachers believe a child to be stupid they will treat it differently, the child will internalize that judgement and behave accordingly, and a vicious circle is set up (Delamont, 1983:64).

It is well known that teachers' expectations are reflected in pupils' behaviour and that their expectations vary for various types of students (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991:177). Mead (1934) puts forward the idea that bodily behaviour is parallel with the behaviour of the mind and it has been found that teachers often are unaware of their body language (Alexander, 1992; Gamble and Gamble, 1993; Hall and Hall, 1988).

According to symbolic interactionism people need to look upon circumstances from the others point of view. For the teacher, this can be the prerequisite for apprehending pupils' states of mind, their understanding and point of view.

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) refer to Weinstein (1987) who points out that research show students to be highly sensitive to different types of behaviour which teachers may show towards different groups of students, such as high and low achievers or boys and girls. Students sense highly subtle differences in interaction patterns and are responsive to non-verbal messages conveyed. Students who receive differential treatment are likely to infer expectations the teacher has with regard to their performance (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991:177). While teachers should adjust their interaction with pupils to their individual needs, Good and Brophy (1991:128-129) found differential treatment offered to high and low achievers, to the disadvantages of low achievers. To take examples; 'low achievers' were allowed less time to answer questions; they were given the answer rather than given prompts when uncertain; they received less praise; they received briefer feedback to questions; they were talked to in less warm tone of voice; and experienced less acceptance of their ideas. Such findings indicate that teachers' perception may influence their practice, pupils learning and their attainment.

In their study, Carr and Krutz-Costes (1994)<sup>14</sup> aimed at determining the accuracy of teachers' perceptions of their pupils' cognitive and motivational characteristics in order to find out what characteristics had the most influence in shaping teachers' perceptions. The study found that teachers were fairly accurate in evaluating children's academic

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<sup>14</sup> Nineteen third grade teachers who had taught for an average of 13.1 years participated in the study. Each of them nominated six children of different abilities (low, medium, and high) from their classes. The children were tested on metacognition knowledge, self-concept and attributional beliefs. The teachers completed a questionnaire about the reason for academic success or failure (Carr and Krutz-Costes, 1994).

ability and metacognition. The results also showed that teachers viewed high-ability children more favourably than low ability children. Teachers' perceptions of those variables showed an exaggerated relationship to achievement. All the teachers' perceptions variables were highly intercorrelated with the strongest correlation appearing between the perception of ability and metacognition ( $r=.90$ ) (Carr and Krutz-Costes, 1994). The results implied that teachers rely primarily on academic ability when evaluating their pupils' motivational characteristics, and on this latter factor teachers' perceptions were often inaccurate. Teachers' perceptions of children's self-concept and attributional beliefs were also inaccurate.

To produce a detailed description of teacher-pupil relationships, Mortimore et al. (1988) conducted an extensive study in the UK.<sup>15</sup> One of its aims was to see whether teachers saw their roles solely as that of educators or whether they were also involved with children on a more personal level (Mortimore, et al., 1988:63-64). The authors found diverse examples of teacher-pupil relationships. Just over a third of teachers, teaching second and third year, seemed to have a friendly relationship with their pupils. Substantial variation in attitude towards pupils was also recorded in the study. Examples of teacher-pupil relationships with no sign of warm attitude were found, along with situations where children's talk was ignored and discipline was seen as the important issue. However, many teachers showed interest in children above and beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Delamont (1983) found evidence on how teachers form their assessments of pupils and suggests that it is more likely to be based on personal-front display than on any systematic or theoretical evidence (Delamont, 1983). Brown and McIntyre (1993) found that differences in ability were prominent among the characteristics to which teachers respond in the

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<sup>15</sup> A group of 2000 pupils in the junior years of primary school were included in the study which was followed up by observation for the extension of four years (Mortimore et al., 1988).

classroom. Where this happened it tended to be the case that only those students who were judged to be 'more able' and in need of extension tasks were given opportunities to develop areas of personal interest (Brown and McIntyre, 1993:130).

In two Israeli studies, Butler (1994) investigated how teachers respond to pupils' failure, attributed to low ability or to low effort, and on the ways in which pupils interpret and react to these responses. The main aim of the first study was to generate teachers' responses, which then could be used to investigate pupils' responses. The results clearly confirmed that teachers respond differently to inferences of low effort and low ability, but they did not generate different responses when relating to younger and older students. Most teachers reported that they experience anger towards the low effort pupils and compassion for the low ability ones.

The second study examined how well children analysed teacher's responses. The results showed that the children identified the emotions behind teachers' different responses quite accurately. However, children in a low effort group inferred significantly greater teacher anger ( $M=2.61$ ) than children in the so-called helpless group ( $M=1.21$ ). Butler (1994:290) suggests that her findings show that teachers spontaneously provide more attributional cues than previously suggested.

Vygotsky's theory on 'Zone of Proximal Development' includes the assumption that social interaction can lead to delays in children's development, abnormal development or even regression according to environmental factors. This can occur:

...under conditions in which partners seen as having greater skills are in fact incorrect or when adults doubt that children are capable of further development (Tudge and Rogoff, 1989:25, citing: Tudge, in press; Vygotsky, 1978; Zinchenko, personal communication).

Teachers can be helped to augment their abilities to respond in such situations. In recent years several developmental projects have been

initiated to promote and foster teachers' insight into children's difficulties. Hanks (1994) demonstrates one such approach that proved to be helpful in the UK. The programme was designed to deepen teachers understanding of discouraged children. By exploring the child's learning from the child's perspective, the teachers were more likely to become aware of the factors that had impeded its learning and by this they were better capable of discovering the most appropriate response within the classroom. Consequently, teachers find it possible to note and reflect on manners of speaking to children, which involve genuinely, enabling language patterns and avoid unwittingly discouraging mixed messages. This chain of linkages has received strong empirical support and has provided a rationale for retraining programme. Hanks (1994) claims that extensive evidence is available on how best to respond to most children's emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties, as well as on how teachers might be supported or helped to get a more extensive understanding and deeper insight into children's special needs (Hanks, 1994). She further maintains that mainstream teachers have found it increasingly difficult to apply this knowledge in the classroom and children with learning difficulties add to the existing pressure.

One way to increase the quality of interaction in the classroom, explored by researchers like Galton (1989), is to exploit the potential of collaborative tasks within groups more fully. It needs to be made clear that frequently, what is seemingly co-operation, is indeed individualised work and therefore does not function to enhance pupil's involvement (Bennett, 1994; Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Putnam, 1993). Several researches show that collaborative work is rare both in the UK and the USA. (Alexander 1992; Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Kutnick and Rogers, 1994; Putnam, 1993). Alexander (1992:65) found that the most common grouping was to sort children by ability and to make the groups as homogenous as possible.

Group work is mediated by several factors, e.g. the composition of the group, task structures and training. These are factors, which teachers can take into account to expand the positive aspects of interaction in the classroom. Alexander (1992:143) argues for much greater prominence to be given to the potential of genuine pupil-pupil collaboration. Evidence has revealed that where learning tasks are genuinely collaborative and where structured interaction is facilitated by the teacher, children will use the group as a source for information and seek assistance within the group (Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Wragg and Bennett, 1990). This could give the teacher an opportunity for more meaningful use of time and provide intentional teacher-pupil interaction.

Little effort seems to be made in many classrooms to take into account and try to understand children's different personalities, skills and abilities. If a teacher's perception of a pupil is biased, it may well place limitations on that particular child's learning. Children with special needs, whose strengths or weaknesses may not have been given the consideration they deserve, may suffer most from a teacher's skewed perception. It is fairly obvious that there is a possibility that the child will not be treated according to its individual needs.

#### ***2.4 The Right to Education for All***

The right to education for all children has in recent years been stated both internationally and within single countries. The Convention of the Rights of the Child stated that children with disabilities have the right to special care, education and training in order to be able to lead a decent life in dignity and receive the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration as possible (UNESCO, 1989). To extend this declaration, the right to education for all children was further emphasised in the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990). The right to education for all is further underlined in the International Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). Delegates from ninety-two governments and twenty-

five international organisations reaffirmed their commitment to Education for All, recognising the necessity of providing education for children with special educational needs within the regular education system. They proclaimed that:

every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,

every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,

education systems should be designed and educational programme implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,

those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a childcentred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,

regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO, 1994:8).

The guiding principle for this framework was that:

...schools should accommodate **all children** regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized groups (UNESCO, 1994:15).

By this declaration, schools are challenged to develop pedagogy, which aims at meeting the needs of all pupils, including pupils with special needs.

The Salamanca declaration highlights progressive principles but it can be argued that there may be a distance between decision-making and

provisions. Even though the principles are ideologically and organisationally an exemplary mode, there is a real danger that many children, not least pupils with special needs, will remain outside the frame and be forgotten. Altogether 37% of the world's nations see inclusion of all children in ordinary schools as the main aim within the development of special education and many examples of good practice can be found in many countries (UNESCO, 1996). In spite of real progress being made in many countries with regard to meeting pupils needs, UNESCO reports that as few as 1% of children with special needs in the developing countries obtain any kind of education (UNESCO, 1995a), and as many as 8% of the countries in the world have no objectives in this regard (UNESCO, 1995b). According to a UNESCO report, only a few countries have a markedly different special educational policy. These are the Nordic countries, Italy, USA, Spain and Britain. In all these countries the ideology of inclusion is emphasised (UNESCO, 1996). The UNESCO declaration of Education for All is reflected in The Educational Acts in Iceland where it is stated that every school and every teacher is expected to organise education that aims at meeting the needs of all children (Educational Act, 1995).

#### 2.4.1 Special Educational Needs

A substantial number of children in each society experiences disabilities. These are children who, because of genetics or other difficulties, do not cope with certain fundamental tasks required by their environment (Dalen, 1994:9). These difficulties can be heterogeneous; they may be extensive or specific, mild or severe. The Warnock Committee (HMSO, 1986) concluded that 'up to one of five' children would require some form of special educational provision during their time at school because of learning difficulties. Sigurðsson (1993) states that about one per cent of children are so severely disable that they require, and will require considerable help with most, or even all basic living skills. Traditionally, disabilities have been placed in several categories, often in terms of underlying medical diagnosis, such as "blind; partially sighted; deaf;



partially deaf; delicate; diabetic; educationally subnormal; epileptic; maladjusted; physically handicapped; and those with speech defects” (HMSO, 1986:20).

Researchers maintain that the process of labelling pupils may turn out to be more influential in causing learning difficulties than any other activity in which teachers engage (Ainscow, 1987; Hart, 1996; Widlake, 1984). The Warnock Committee’s task was to review educational provisions in England, Scotland and Wales (HMSO, 1986). One of the key recommendations of the Committee was to abolish medical categories of handicap, as such categorisations were no longer to be seen as useful concepts in the educational context. The Committee’s concept of special education was broader than the traditional one of education by special methods appropriate for particular categories of children. The Committee concluded that it was impossible to establish precise criteria for defining what constitutes handicap (HMSO, 1986:37). Norwich (1990) maintains that this view on disabilities and difficulties is in accordance with current ideas in educational circles. However, it only presents an educational starting point. In the educational context, children had long been divided in to two groups; handicapped and non-handicapped children, receiving two different types of education; special education or ordinary education. This, the Committee thought was too simple and called for a more positive approach. The Committee therefore adopted the term ‘Special Educational Need’.<sup>16</sup> The term was seen in relation to the whole child, both its abilities and disabilities, but not in terms of a particular disability, which a child might be considered to have. The main arguments against medically based categories were:

- many children suffer from more than one disability, producing categorisation difficulties which affect school provision;
- categories confuse what special education is needed, in promoting the idea that all children in the same category have similar educational needs;

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<sup>16</sup> Here the term ‘special needs’ refers to temporary and constant special educational needs, including special needs following disability.

- categories as the basis for special provision draw resources away from children who do not fit categories;
- categories have the effect of labelling children and schools in negative ways which persist beyond school and stigmatise unnecessarily (Norwich, 1990:8).

Norwich (1990) maintains that special needs education highlights the necessity to provide a more positive terminology and it highlights the variable and interactive nature of learning difficulties. He criticises the terminology used and the separation between the terms used to define needs and educational provision. Hart (1996) argues that in order to open new opportunities, the language of 'learning difficulties' and 'special needs', should be set aside, because it constrains our thinking and limits our sense of the scope available to us for positive invention. She also claims that the language of learning difficulties and special needs has discouraged teachers from using their knowledge, expertise and experience fully. It keeps recreating the idea that something additional to or different needed in order for some children to learn more successfully (Hart, 1996). Norwich (1990) argues that behind abolishing categories lies a complex issue which is not easily resolved and the whole concept of special needs is ambiguous and tautological (Norwich, 1990:18, citing Tomlinson, 1985). This has certainly been demonstrated in Iceland. In 1995 the language of 'special needs' was deleted in the new Educational Act (1995). In spite of these fundamental changes in special educational policy, a year later the Ministry of Education published a Regulation for Special Education (no. 389/1996), where the deleted concepts about special education emerged again. The approach towards an important change was not successful.

There has been the tendency to interpret educational difficulties in terms of 'within-child deficit', or what is worse; the category 'special educational need' is used in indiscriminate ways to refer to a large minority of the school population (Ainscow and Muncney, 1987). Teachers, psychologists or doctors have for long been investigating or assessing children in order to find what is wrong with the child. When

assessing pupils educational needs, the focus has for long been on the child itself, while its needs can arise from a range of environmental circumstances, such as within the family, with peers or in the interaction with teachers. Norwich states:

...the growth and development of children can be understood only in relation to the nature of their interactions with the various environments which impinge on them and with which they are constantly interacting (Norwich, 1990:ix).

Norwich refers to Dearden's (1972) conceptual analysis of need in terms of a norm or standard; "the fact that the standard is not being achieved; the fact that what is said to be needed really is the relevant condition of achieving the standard" (Norwich, 1990:131). By this Norwich is arguing that identifying special educational needs, involves understanding what provisions are required. Norwich (1990) discusses the issue further and claims that separating needs from provision is a way of distinguishing between what a child would ideally require, considering his or her characteristics, and the provision available.

It seems to be of importance to focus attention on the child's current position, its circumstances, and what is its need according to what can be done or provided. The Dearden analysis of needs implies three key elements:

- a description of the child's strengths, weaknesses and circumstances of learning;
- goals which are relevant for the child in view of this description;
- optimal means for achieving these goals (Norwich, 1990:131).

To emphasise the individuality of all children, the term 'special' has been used to refer to all children on the ground that all children have 'special' needs. Further, this has led to the use of the concept 'individual needs' instead of 'special educational needs'. Norwich (1990) claims that this is an attempt to rectify the discrimination of those with more unusual characteristics.

Susan Hart (1996) argues that the thinking associated with the language of 'learning difficulties' and 'special needs' has been obstructing.

Teachers' perceptions may be bound up with this language that has been used for a long time and relates to provisions that are no longer accepted in many countries. Hart (1996) claims that the questions teachers apply to their practice need to differ if they are to exploit more fully the scope that exists for enhancing learning within ordinary schools. However, teachers may experience the need for another perspective as a threat. It is necessary to draw teachers' attention to possibilities within the ordinary school and to consider the mismatch between children and learning opportunities provided by the schools. If we are to open up wider possibilities for all children, we need to consider how we think about children's learning and there is an urgent need to change the ways we talk about 'learning difficulties' and 'special needs.' This may be a welcome opportunity for teachers to enhance their understanding of children's learning.

Hart (1996) introduces an alternative way to think about children's learning; thinking relevant in any school context where teachers are seeking to understand children's responses and enhance their learning and development. The approach enables teachers to follow up concerns about specific children without individualising the 'problem' or disconnecting the child from the social processes. It helps teachers to belief in their own possibilities for taking positive action in their classrooms.

This reflection on practice is introduced by Hart (1996) by the concept 'innovative thinking', which involves generating new ideas when responding to children's learning. It involves exploring more closely the dynamics at work in a particular situation in order to find ways of positively influencing and changing a situation that causes concern – or ones' perception of it – through the use of existing resources. Innovative thinking is based on a structure, which consists of five questioning 'moves', each one based on a different perspective on a given situation.

The first move is '*making connections*' and takes in a child's behaviour. It tries to pursue how a child's response is related to features of the schools and in what way the teacher influences a child's behaviour. The second move, '*contradicting*' is meant to explore the underlying norms or perceptions that leads the teacher to perceive a child's response in a certain way (e.g. in a negative or a positive way), by offering a legitimate reading about similar situation. These two moves can show aspects of a given situation that one might not have realised because the situation has been taken for granted, accepted or even undervalued. The third move involves '*taking a child's eye view*'. Then, the teacher needs to step out of his own frame of reference and try to reorganize the meaning of a given situation from the child's perspective. This move challenges and complements the first two moves and may open an understanding that otherwise would be missing. It explores the teachers' perception and the child's experience. In the forth move, '*noting the impact of feelings*', the teacher considers to what extent his/her own feelings may influence the interpretations of the child's learning; to what extent his/her understanding is a part of the teacher's own desires or fears and what new insight it is possible to acquire by understanding this aspect. By going through these four questions or moves, a teacher can be fairly confident in the reliability of his/her judgement; that is to say if it has been reached through enhancing thinking, and all four moves have been examined in combination. The fifth move, '*suspending judgement*' is based on the suggestion that our existing resources might be limited and we should reach our judgement carefully. It is necessary to wait, listen, watch closely and learn more. We might need further information and resources to be able to rely on our judgement (Hart, 1996:3-9).

Innovative thinking is concerned with the teachers' thinking. It directs attention to the teacher who may need to change his/her thinking before an appropriate educational opportunity can be offered. During the different moves, the idea is that a self-check process occurs about own practice and thinking is put forward. This means that the teacher will think more intentionally about his/her own practice and external ideas are

incorporated in the reflective process. S/he analyses actively own perceptions and views the learner from alternative viewpoints; s/he transforms concerns about children's learning into new understanding and analyses the educational context as a whole. Thus, the decisive factor in the conduct of the teachers' work remains their perception of themselves, the pupils and their understanding of how learning occurs. Such practice is distinct from routine, blind and compulsive action, which often is guided by long traditions.

#### 2.4.2 Individual Needs

Within every class in every school, children differ because each human being is unique. Children are all individuals with their qualities or characteristics that make them different from each other, although they all have their basic physical, emotional and social needs. Their individuality needs to be taken into account. It is not only pupils' cognitive skills that differ, but also their experiences, their interest, and their attitude. Watching children in a class, one will see children who are confident and able to call for attention and assistance, which will help their progress and development. While some children are working carefully, other may be impulsive and unsystematic. Dean (1992) maintains that every class is made up of individuals who will be in need of distinct attention. Those are pupils with specific learning problems; those with behaviour or emotional problems; those with gaps in their schooling; those with language problems; and those with outstanding ability of some kind.

Hirst and Peters (1991) distinguish between biological needs, psychological needs, basic needs and functional needs. They claim that the concept of 'need' is always related to conceptions of value and motivation. They argue that every child has deep-seated psychological needs, which are motivational needs. These needs are especially relevant to the content and methods of learning; the needs for stimulation, novelty and environmental mastery. A failure to satisfy such needs may affect

the child's development. In terms of needs, the concept 'interest', which in most cases is socially acquired, is of similar importance. The authors argue that interest has more relevance to the method of teaching than to its content and is crucial in education.

In the 1990<sup>s</sup> ideas about individually guided education has been accepted and implemented in some countries. This development has evolved from the movement 'Education for All', which emphasised that all children should be educated in ordinary schools, and called for a commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils. The movement has its roots in UNESCO's decision, which aimed at encouraging the world's nations to invent a plan in special education within ordinary schools (Ainscow, 1994:13). Anderson and Pavan (1993:61-63) discuss the underlying idea of nongraded, individually guided education. To sum up, it involves a response to each pupil's needs and effort. Individual differences are accepted and respected. Consequently, there is a need for extensive variability in teaching approaches to respond to varying needs. Pupils' cognitive, emotional, physical, aesthetic and social development is nurtured. The organisational framework provides opportunities for each child to interact with other children and adults of varying personalities, backgrounds, abilities, interest and ages. The learning opportunities within the curriculum are individualised to correspond to individual needs, interest and abilities. The standards of performance are clearly defined, but the time taken to reach that end, and the path followed to that end, is flexible and individualised. Pupils' assessment is holistic in order to correspond with the holistic view of learning, and evaluation is continuous. The system empowers teachers to create learning opportunities and to choose teaching approach themselves. Thus, the system is teacher-managed.

Research (Alexander, 1992; Croll and Moses, 1985; Galton, 1989) has showed that individualised teaching gives the teacher limited time to attend to each pupil and thereby hardly any possibilities to meet their needs. Teachers seem to need to consider carefully how they can make

optimal use of the limited time they have in the classroom. Croll and Hastings (1997) refer to Alexander, Rose and Woodhead (1992) who reported that teachers must find an appropriate balance of whole class teaching, group teaching and individualised work, because in many schools whole class teaching have been insufficiently used (Croll and Hastings, 1997:15). Cullingford (1995) points out that all children possess the capacity to learn, but they do not all learn in the same way. In fact, the general education movement towards inclusion<sup>17</sup> lends support to the premise that teachers must be prepared to provide for a wider variance among pupils. Ferguson (1987:100) emphasises that teachers should attempt to motivate each student's creativity, independence and originality. Different interaction routines might be needed, assimilated with new teaching ideas and how to relate to pupils.

#### 2.4.3 Meeting Children's Individual Needs

If a teacher is to meet the needs of all the children in the classroom, a thorough understanding of individual differences is required on the part of the teacher as well as being able to apply various teaching approaches to these needs. Norwich (1990:7) maintains that education should be concerned with meeting educational needs. A variety of conditions could act as obstacles in the educational realm and it does not need to be a simple and direct relationship between the severity and permanence of a disability and educational handicap.

As a professional and a mother of a disabled son, dr. Dianne Ferguson (1995) maintains that the lesson to be learned from the inclusion initiative is that the real challenge is a lot harder and complicated than she thought. She argues that neither special nor general education has the capacity or the vision to challenge and change the situation of

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<sup>17</sup> The term inclusion refers to the right for education for all in ordinary schools, regardless of individual differences. All the pupils see themselves as belonging to the school. Bayliss (1997) definition explains this further: "The concept of diversity is seen as a natural state of being human – (or in educational terms, of being a learner)."



children with disabilities in schools (Ferguson, 1995:285):

Unfortunately, the efforts of professional educators to balance the right of students to be educated with the still unchallenged and highly individualized deficit/remediation model of disability most often resulted in the delivery of educational services along some continuum of locations...to 'fit' the identified type and amount of student deficit and disability (Ferguson, 1995:282).

Ferguson (1995) thinks that a lesson may be learned from the inclusion initiatives, which have taken place in special education in the last three decades:

Neither special nor general education alone has either the capacity or the vision to challenge and change the deep-rooted assumptions that separate and track children and youths according to presumptions about ability, achievement, and eventual social contribution (Ferguson, 1995:285).

Ferguson (1995) argues that a meaningful change will require nothing less than a joint effort to reinvent schools to be more accommodating to all dimensions of human diversity. The first shift, she argues involves moving towards schools that are structured around pupils' diversity and that accommodate many different ways of organising learning. The second shift involves an emphasis on the role of the learner in creating knowledge, competence, and the ability to pursue further learning. This implies beginning with the appreciation of pupils' differences that can be stretched to incorporate the differences of disability and the effective teaching technology created by special educators. The third shift involves changing our view of the schools' role from one of providing services to one of providing educational supports for learning.

Ainscow and Muncey (1987:17) argue that it is through the curriculum that children's needs are best met. By 'curriculum' the authors are referring to all tasks, activities and experiences presented by the teacher, planned or unplanned. They state that meeting individual needs is about achieving a match between the interest, attainment and attitudes of each

child and the programme that is offered. Along the same lines, Alexander (1992) argues that if individual needs are to be met and tackled, provisions must be based on a broadly based curriculum; a stimulating learning environment; flexible teaching strategies; the nature of the needs in question; the means of identifying the children who have them; the procedures for diagnosing these children's specific requirements; and finally on the appropriate forms of educational provision (Alexander, 1992:11). Thus, the provisions should include at the very least, matters of definition, identification, diagnosis and provisions.

Through such a process and being with the pupils every day, teachers get to know the children well. Although, parents have only proved to be moderately accurate in judging their children's preferences, (mothers were significantly more accurate than fathers) (Miller, Davis, Wilde and Brown, 1993), teachers need close relationships with families.<sup>18</sup> Non-school time provides key information that has educational implications, such as the nature of pupils' interests, motivation, habits, fears, routines, needs and health. The aim by co-operation with parents must be to gain more complete understanding of the pupils. With regard to pupils with special needs, families can be invaluable in determining appropriate educational experiences and can do an excellent job of finding priorities (Dockrell and McShane, 1993; Edwards and Redfern, 1988; Giangreco, Cloninger and Iverson, 1998; McConkey, 1985). It has been found that parents from all social backgrounds feel a strong need to talk about their children and their education, but parents' interest and concern for their children's education is not always recognised by the 'designers and providers' of education (Epstein, 1995; Hughes, Wikeley and Nash, 1994; Wolfendale, 1989). This is unfortunate, as research findings have shown that parental involvement and parent contact with school is related to school performance, as well as parental monitoring is positively

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<sup>18</sup> Families can mean different things, e.g. two parent families, single parent families, blended families with stepchildren, adoptive families, multigenerational families (Giangreco et al., 1998).

related to school achievement (Edwards and Redfern, 1988; Okagaki and French, 1998).

Another side of this issue, is the teacher's responsibility to provide a climate in which individual children can make the choices about the curriculum and explore matters of interest to them, rather than deciding in advance exactly what each child will study.

Cooper and McIntyre (1996)<sup>19</sup> set out a study aimed at investigating successful classroom teaching, and how teachers achieve such success. The authors maintain that the major outcome of their study was the support it offers for a transactional theory of teaching and learning. Students feel learning opportunities to be increased when teaching strategies are transactional, thus when they involve the integration of pupil concerns and interests with teacher objectives. The study also highlighted the importance of teacher-pupil 'bi-directionality', which emphasises the interdependence of teacher-pupil influence. These bi-directional processes were facilitated by use of interactive and reactive teaching approaches:

On the basis of this study it would seem that teachers are very alert to what they see as the desirability of being open to pupil influence and the need to incorporate pupil influence in their classroom teaching (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:130).

Margaret Peter, the editor of the British Journal of Special Education says in an issue devoted to differentiation in schools:

Differentiation is the key to improved teaching and learning for all children and without it integration... becomes a meaningless quest (Peter, 1992:5).

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<sup>19</sup> The study was carried out in four different comprehensive schools. Fourteen teachers participated and it involved a total of 325 pupils. It was found that the data was improved when the interviewer consciously applied measures that are derived from the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers; empathy; unconditional positive regard; congruence and repeated probing (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996).

Differentiation is a process, which involves analysing each pupil's needs, his or her experience, knowledge, understanding, attitude and skills, and finding the most effective means of meeting these needs (Weston, 1992:6; Hall, 1992:20). It is argued that differentiation is the prerequisite for pupils to approach a task on their own premises (Peter, 1992:5). This means that their learning is not only differentiated because of different abilities but also because the pupils learn in a different way. In such a situation, the aim is that all pupils are real participants. Nordahl and Overland (1992) have conducted research on how teachers might meet pupils' individual needs. They maintain that differentiation should be applied for all pupils, but should not encourage segregation. A teaching practice based on such approaches may impede the negative effects of labelling children according to abilities and hinder competition and comparison of pupils.

However, education does not only involve content and aims, methods and procedures. In dealing with pupils' needs, principles in interactions such as respect, autonomy, dignity and virtue are of great importance (Hirst and Peters, 1991).

Motivation and interest are interrelated concepts, closely related to value. Questioning what educational values and social context is suitable for the individual child seems to be of central importance when considering its educational needs. Hare (1993) questions why empathy should be considered a central ideal in the context of teaching and what the link is between teaching and caring for one's students. He answers his own question and claims that if the benevolent affections in human relationships is valued, there is a need for teachers who can foster these dispositions through their interaction with pupils. "The caring teacher does not respond out of a sense of duty but in genuine display of a benevolent disposition" (Hare, 1993:24). The author further explains that what is needed in the classroom is an atmosphere which is warm, supportive, tolerant and sensitive, and there is a need for teachers who have the necessary judgement to act in ways which show that they care.

He argues that there has been the tendency in educational circles to undervalue empathetic behaviour. Empathy and care for one's subject is vital and needs to go hand in hand. Recalling Dewey's point:

...in urging the need of psychology in the preparation of the teacher there is no question of ignoring personal power or finding a substitute for personal magnetism (Hare, 1993:25).

It has been shown that training in human relations theories produces positive changes in teacher attitudes and corresponding changes in improved classroom learning climates (Thompson and Rudolph, 1992:100-102). Teacher training in Iceland does not ensure a skilful teacher-pupil interaction. Students in teacher training in Iceland are not specially trained in human interaction skills (Curriculum of the University of Akureyri 1999-2000, 1999-2000; Curriculum of the Iceland University of Education, 1999-2000).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

It has been found that teacher-pupil interaction plays a vital part in children's learning. This interaction occurs while teachers are teaching, listening, supporting pupils or holding personal conversations. Several research studies have provided evidence on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom, on the effect of this subtle interaction between the teacher and pupils and also how teachers' perception may influence this interaction. Further, research has clarified how the quality of interaction may facilitate learning generally and specifically the learning of pupils with disabilities. In most classrooms there are children with disabilities or difficulties who may be experiencing more problems than most of the other children. These children may need expanded individual attention and teaching approaches that require extensive interaction with teachers and peers.

In an extensive observational study it was found that primary teachers were involved in interaction with pupils nearly 80% of the time they

were observed, of which 70% of the interaction was with individual children, 20% with the whole class and under 10% with groups study (Galton, 1989). Other studies have revealed that teacher-pupils interaction in the classroom is a sequence of extremely short interactions (Alexander, 1992). Alexander (1992) found that teachers easily waste their valuable time while they interact in a brief and somewhat superficial way, monitoring individuals. The author suggests that different instructional adaptations and new skills in interacting with children might be needed. Social support is needed in the classroom in the form of more capable peers and teacher scaffolding (Alexander, 1992).

Carr and Krutz-Costes (1994) found that teachers are fairly accurate in evaluating children's academic ability and metacognition. Nevertheless, it has emerged that teachers' perception of pupils is often biased, which might place limitation on pupils' learning. Teachers tended to view high ability children more favorably than low ability children (Carr and Krutz-Costes, 1994). However, Croll and Moses (1985) found that teachers are more occupied with children with special educational needs than other pupils, although the time spent on giving individual attention to both these groups of children was limited.

If a teacher is to meet the needs of all the children in the classroom, a thorough understanding of the individual and of individual differences is required on the part of the teacher as well as being able to apply multiple teaching approaches to these needs. This may be acquired through the curriculum (Ainscow and Muncney, 1987), but Nordahl and Overland (1992) found that differentiation should be applied for all pupils, as a teaching practice based on such approach may impede the negative effects of labelling children according to abilities and hinder competition and comparison of pupils.

Ferguson (1995) maintains that teachers' efforts to balance the right of students to be educated with the still unchallenged and highly

individualised deficit/remediation model of disability has often resulted in teachers' trying to accommodate to the identified type and amount of student deficit and disability. She argues, that what seems to be urgent is nothing less than a joint effort to reinvent schools to be more accommodating to all dimensions of human diversity. We need schools that are not structured around pupils' diversity but rather a shift that emphasises the role of the learner in creating knowledge, competence, and the ability to pursue further learning. This implies beginning with the appreciation of pupils' differences and changing our view of the school's role from one of providing services to one of providing educational support for learning. Hart (1996) argues that in order to open new opportunities, the language of 'learning difficulties' and 'special needs', should be set aside, because it constrains our thinking and limits our sense of the scope available to us for positive invention. She also claims that the language of learning difficulties and special needs has discouraged teachers from using their knowledge, expertise and experience fully. It keeps recreating the idea that something additional to or different needed in order for some children to learn more successfully (Hart, 1996).

One way to make this possible is for teachers to exercise empathy and an understanding of pupils' individual needs (Hare, 1993 and 1996; Hirst and Peters, 1991; Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). Interaction of this type requires the understanding of fundamental factors such as children's emotional situation, learning abilities and how learning occurs. It is recognised that teachers' understanding of children's abilities and expectations do influence children and their learning, and pupils are well aware of teachers' perceptions (Butler, 1994).

The following questions are meant to explore teachers' understanding of teacher-pupil interaction and learning in the classroom; the interpersonal relations and choice of methods that seem to be of such a great importance for both learning and social development.

1. What is teachers' own understanding of their behaviour in the classroom? What abilities and skills do they consider important with regard to teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom? This includes both teachers' understanding of their use of non-verbal behaviour as well as the choice of teaching approaches and tasks.
2. What is teachers' understanding of pupils' individual needs and in what way do they think these needs are best met? How do teachers discover pupils' individual needs, gather information about their needs and provide for such needs in the curriculum?
3. How do teachers think they can best convey interpersonal skills such as empathy, interest, and trust in the classroom and thereby show understanding of pupils needs? How do teachers' view the importance of such interpersonal skills in the teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom?

It has been found that teachers in small schools have the significant advantage to be able to give pupils personal attention and to recognise the pupils' individual needs. In spite of multi-grade classes in small schools, the small number of pupils can enable teachers to meet individual needs and enhance pupils' participation. This can also include pupils with disabilities because the learning environment can be adjusted towards meeting each child's potential. In the following chapter, this issue will be explored as well as the situation of small schools in Iceland.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE POSSIBILITIES OF SMALL SCHOOLS

#### *3.1 Introduction*

With the Educational Act of 1974 (55/1974), a great step forward was taken in Icelandic educational policy, because the Act clearly stated that pupils were no longer assigned to classes according to ability or results, and education was intended to meet the needs of all pupils (§ 50).

Compulsory schools had the responsibility to operate according to the needs and ability of the individual pupil and promote the pupil's general development, health and education (Educational Act, 1974. §2).

Children with disabilities began to attend ordinary schools, even schools in their own neighbourhood. Parents and professionals alike put pressure on educational authorities to admit all children to their neighbourhood schools. In the following years teachers showed a positive attitude towards the integration of all pupils in ordinary schools, a process that has since continued in many communities in the country (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1988; Sigurðardóttir, 1987). The Education Act (1995) and the most recent National Curriculum (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1999a) leaves no doubt about all children's right to education in Iceland.

A study carried out in Iceland has shown how small schools, because of their size and characteristics, have an opportunity to apply exemplary teaching approaches and create a highly supportive ethos (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1988). The conclusions of the study revealed the possibilities of small schools to meet pupils' individual needs,<sup>20</sup> and indicated that small schools may be better able to meet such needs. Thus, at first sight it would appear that small schools are ideal for

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<sup>20</sup> In this chapter, the term meeting individual needs refers to the link between interest, attainment and attitude of a child and the programme that is offered, in other words, when the pupil's individual needs are considered in organising and implementing the teaching programme (Ainscow and Munccey, 1987:17; Nordahl and Overland, 1992:17).

learning. Other research points to the same conclusion. In Norway, Munro (1975) found that by their nature small schools are ideally suited for providing attention to individual differences as well as giving children more opportunities to learn from each other and to interact with different age groups. Bell and Sigsworth (1987) maintain that in small schools in the UK, teachers are able to support the individual child, social relationships among pupils can flourish, and conditions are favourable for close teacher-pupil relationships.

The apparently favourable conditions to meet the needs of individual children in small schools, thereby creating conditions for closer relationships for the benefit of all pupils, give rise to a number of questions. Are small schools as unproblematic as it might appear? Do teachers use the possibilities within small schools to meet the needs of individual children? What is teachers' understanding of children with special needs? Does the close relationship within small schools benefit teachers and pupils? What aspects of small schools may facilitate pupils' learning and social development? What are the teaching approaches in small schools and how does the close community links encourage teachers to co-operate with both colleagues and parents.

In this chapter, the literature on small schools will be reviewed. The chapter deals with various aspects of small schools; what are the distinguishing qualities of small schools? What are their strengths and disadvantages? The chapter also evaluates teaching in multi-grade classes and what teaching approaches may be appropriate in this type of classes, as well as relationships between teachers and pupils in small schools. In the concluding part of the chapter there is a discussion of small schools in Iceland and a review of relevant research.

### ***3.2 The Characteristics of Small Schools***

Small schools are characterised by a small number of pupils, small classes and multi-grade groups, with at least two age groups sharing a

classroom. Until recently small schools in Iceland were referred to as schools with less than 100 pupils (Bjarnason, 1992). Now, the Association of Small Schools<sup>21</sup> in Iceland defines small schools as those in which children of more than one age group share a classroom. In Norway, where almost half of all schools are small, the same definition is used (Melheim, 1998:9). Pupils in small schools in Iceland can be as few as three in a class and the age gap can be up to four years (Þorsteinsson, 1998). Because of the small number of pupils, pupils and staff know each other well. Frequently, there are close links with the local community, which increases the likelihood of support from parents, and the community (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987). These distinguishing features can be contrasted with larger schools where each class is made up of a distinct grade and classes are big, and the development of close teacher-pupil relationships may become more difficult to achieve. The role of the community may also be less distinctive (Hopkins and Ellis, 1991).

### 3.2.1 Problems of Small Schools

The problems of small schools seem to have various origins. They seem to relate to the geographical location of schools, as well as social and educational issues. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) maintain that small schools in rural districts seem in particular to face problems of limited resources, geographical spread and difficulty in the recruitment of teachers and administrators. Galton and Patrick (1990:8) describe the case against small schools as threefold. Because of their size and limited number of teachers, the schools can be unable to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The second problem is the cost. It is argued that it is uneconomic to run small schools. Thirdly, small schools are described

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<sup>21</sup> The Association of Small Schools was established in 1989. It has initiated professional networking between small schools all over the country (Sigþórsson, 1997). To call attention to the issues of small schools, the association has organised an annual conference on the issues of small schools, as well as publishing a regular newsletter and a book on the subject.

as socially limiting, providing a narrow mix of children and few opportunities for pupils to be engaged in 'out of school activities'. Moreover, Galton and Patrick (1990) argue that in schools with a small number of staff, it may be difficult for teachers to attend in-service training. Therefore it may be argued that small schools may be in danger of stagnation and few opportunities for infusion of new ideas. Comber et al. (1981:33) claim that in small schools it has been observed that pupils suffer from having few children of their own age and sex to play and mix with, and that there is a limited number of adults to whom they can turn for help and assurance.

When reviewing the conclusions of other authors, there seems to be a general agreement on what the difficulties of small schools are. In relation to the previously mentioned ones they seem to relate to problems of organising teaching in multi-grade classes, with two, three or even four age groups, as this requires more planning and preparation. It seems to be difficult to provide a wide and balanced curriculum because of how few teachers there are. There is a possibility of there being a limited range of skills and knowledge among the teaching staff. There are, for instance, problems in covering all subjects that require special training such as science or music. In addition teachers may experience lack of opportunities to share their ideas. There can be too few children in any one class to provide an incentive for the pupils or to establish friendships. This can also cause difficulties in organising group activities (Bell and Sigworth, 1987; Forward, 1988; Hopkins, 1985; Mann, 1996; Veenman, 1995).

### 3.2.2 Advantages of Small Schools

In a recent report by a LEA in the UK, it is argued that the advantages of small schools include the cultural, social and economical benefits for a community in retaining its own school. Further, opportunities to forge strong school and community links, including links with other schools in the community; minimum travelling time and cost for parents and the

LEA; opportunities to develop strong school ethos, good pastoral care, and detailed knowledge of pupils and families; opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to develop socially (Mann, 1996:4). The school thus takes on the identity of the local community and also has a role in shaping the culture and community within the locality, as well as sustaining such ties with neighbouring regions. The immediate nature of interpersonal relationships within the community is likely to benefit pupils, both with regard to educational and social factors. Melheim (1998) speaks of the importance of strengthening schools and of making schools the centre of the local community. Schools may be the location of the local library, community centre, sports centre etc.

Galton and Patrick (1990) explain how supporters of small schools argue that in small schools pupils are able to build up confidence and independence through being assigned numerous tasks of responsibility. Small classes can help advance achievement. The confidence gained throughout their stay in the small school means that pupils find it easy to adjust to a new school at the secondary stage (Galton and Patrick, 1990:24-25). This is in accordance with what was found by Bell and Sigsworth (1987). They say that a family atmosphere provides security, especially for young children, and makes close individual attention possible. These distinct advantages have had positive benefits for pupils social and educational development.

Galton, Fogelman, Hargreaves and Cavendish (1991) found that small schools certainly had the advantage of higher levels of engagement by their pupils on tasks, and a trend that suggests their superior achievement as measured on standardised tests. However, they point out that curriculum provision and the pattern of pupil and teacher behaviour is similar to that found in studies of larger British primary classrooms. If neither of these conditions is different, there must be other factors that result in a better outcome for pupils in small schools. This could be the family-like atmosphere or other working patterns used by teachers and pupils alike. The authors also supply evidence, which indicates that

pupils in small schools tend to work harder and experience a wider range of teaching approaches than pupils in larger schools. They do however, consider these differences small compared to the variation, which exists between teachers within the same school (Galton et al., 1991). This indicates that teachers' behaviour is very dependent on their individual personalities. The findings of Galton et al. (1991) raise questions about the way in which teachers in small schools interact with pupils.

Other researchers confirm that there are more similarities than differences between small and large schools in Britain (Forsythe et al., 1983; Galton and Patrick, 1990). With reference to his findings, Tomlinson (1990) came to the conclusion that there does not exist a single construct, 'the small rural school.' He maintains that these schools are in important respects, as different from one another as they are collectively from larger schools (Tomlinson, 1990:291).

In order to ascertain whether there were significant differences in the ways schools of different size approached the implementation of the National Curriculum, Waugh (1991) conducted a research in the UK in 1990 and compared the effects of the Educational Reform Act upon primary schools of different size. Two hundred schools from different parts of England participated. The results seemed to indicate that schools of different sizes have different advantages and disadvantages in implementing curriculum change. Waugh (1991) summarises the aspects of small schools:

- a) the head teacher has a substantial class-teaching role, which can enable her to influence curriculum change easily.
- b) each child and his needs may be known to each member of staff.
- c) the (usually) smaller class sizes enable teachers to give pupils personal attention.
- d) co-operation with other schools can enrich the curriculum and widen the social circle of the pupils.

- e) children of different ages can work together easily when appropriate.
- f) being (often) at the heart of the community, the small schools can draw upon the expertise of local residents to enrich the curriculum (Waugh, 1991:11-12).

The advantages of implementing the National Curriculum in larger schools reported by Waugh (1991) are:

- a) a large staff may provide a range of expertise.
- b) where children are taught in a number of single-age classes comparisons between performance may be made and planning can be shared.
- c) new initiatives in curriculum development may be responded to with provision of new resources, since large budget may afford flexibility.
- d) children experience a variety of teaching styles, since they tend to change classes each year.
- e) a large staff tends to have some turnover in personnel, allowing the school to appoint teachers who have expertise in areas in which there may be deficiencies.
- f) the larger staff has increased scope for internal in-service training (Waugh, 1991:12).

This comparison supports the view that teachers in small schools should have the possibility to meet the individual needs of pupils both socially and educationally, because of the thorough knowledge they can acquire about each child. Moreover, a personal contact can exist both within the school and with the community. On the other hand, co-operation and expertise seems to be more accessible in large schools. However, forming networks can prevent the lack of professional support and isolation in small schools, and the close relationship between teachers within many small schools may have advantages.

Bell and Sigsworth (1987), who conducted an extensive investigation of small schools in the UK, maintain that the first and crucial antidote to the internal isolation of small rural school is the presence of ordinary human

relationships. If this exists, rural teachers may be less isolated from their immediate colleagues than many teachers in urban schools. But solving the problem is not only a matter of satisfactory relations within the school itself, “it pertains also to the kinds of stimulation which can only be obtained by professional contact beyond the school itself” (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987:144). Seeking assistance and support is perceived as a source of strength. Professional isolation is also a consequence of the culture of individual teacher autonomy existing in many schools and is thus not only an issue related to rural schools (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987:11).

### 3.2.3 Multi-grade Classes

Veenman (1995) defines ‘multi-grade classes’ and ‘multi-age’ classes and claims it is important to differentiate the two concepts. He says they both involve mixed ages of children in the same class but the intentions behind the arrangements are different. In multi-grade classes there are pupils from two or more grades, taught by one teacher. They retain their respective grade-level assignments and their respective grade-specific curriculum (Veenman, 1995:319).

While multi-grade classes are usually formed out of necessity of administrative and economic reasons, multi-age classes are formed for their perceived educational benefits (Veenman, 1995:319). Some schools may deliberately mix both age and grade levels for educational reasons, resulting in pupils of different ages working on the same or similar tasks. “The student is kept with the same teacher in the same class for a number of years, usually three. This practice is described as multi-age grouping” (Veenman, 1995:319).



Veenman, Voeten and Lem (1987) conducted an observational study in the Netherlands on the effects of mixed-age classes.<sup>22</sup> The study was carried out in 12 mixed-age classes and 12 single-age classes and was based on four major questions:

How do pupils and teachers in multi-age classes spend their learning and instructional time during reading/language and mathematics instruction?

In what way do students with different ability levels use their learning time?

What is the relationship between grouping arrangements of pupils and their learning time?

What is the relationship between active learning time and academic achievement in mixed-age and single age class? (Veenman et al., 1987:78).

It was found that pupils in single-age classes spent more time on average, working on tasks prescribed by the teacher than pupils in multi-age classes, while pupils in multi-age classes spent more time working individually. Veenman et al. (1987) add that although these differences were statistically significant, they were not dramatic. No significant differences between these types of classes were found in time spent in on reading/language and mathematics. In addition, no significant differences in achievement were found between pupils in the two categories of classes (Veenman et al., 1987:88).

A review of thirty experimental studies in the USA and Canada concludes that it is the social and emotional development of the child and not academic achievement, which benefits from multi-grade classrooms. Through greater flexibility, multi-grade classrooms can better meet the needs of both fast and slow learners. The argument is made that multi-grade grouping is 'natural' and leads to less tension and aggression

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<sup>22</sup> In 1987, Veenman, Voeten and Lem had not come to the definition clarified above and defined 'mixed-age classes' as, when: "pupils from more than one grade level are taught simultaneously by one teacher" (Veenman et al., 1987:75-89).

(Pratt, 1986). The authors suggest the introduction of some cross-age activities into all primary schools.

Interestingly, advantages of multi-grade classes are recognised in the Swedish Government Bill on Education from 1976 (Malmros and Norlén, 1984). The Act includes clause encouraging age integration for the benefit of individual student development. At that time a new curriculum also supported such moves by removing year-by-year divisions and stressing multi-grade co-operation. In Sweden, teachers have expressed an interest in multi-grade approaches as means of developing more meaningful and stimulating teaching approaches. It is, however, not believed that multi-grade organisation in itself leads to effective teaching (Malmros and Norlén, 1984). It is worth noting that during the school year 1987/88, as many as 35% of all Swedish primary classes were multi-grade classes. Of these, 44% had introduced multi-grade classes as an approach for educational reasons while 20% explained the use of this method as being a mixture of educational and resource-oriented solution (Malmros and Sahlin, 1992).

Several studies show that teachers find teaching in multi-grade classes difficult. In a review of 80 first schools in England, HMI<sup>23</sup> affirmed that multi-grade classes present difficulties for a substantial number of teachers. It was noticed that both the more and the less able within the class might suffer some neglect (Department of Education and Sciences, 1982). Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher and Vile (1982) report that teachers find classroom management more difficult in mixed-ability classrooms and they find it difficult to cater for all ability groups. This is in accordance with the findings of other authors. Teachers find working in multi-grade classes very difficult and frequently solve the problem by organising teaching as if they were teaching two different classes which had to receive instruction by turns (Eggertsdóttir, 1999; Veenman et al., 1987:88).

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<sup>23</sup> HMI (Her Majesty Inspection).

Instead of seeing multi-grade classes as a challenge or as an incentive to adopt teaching approaches that arouse educational as well as social development, some teachers seem to approach the arrangement as a burden (Veenman et al., 1987). This is in accordance with the findings of Reid et al. (1982) and who studied mixed-abilities classes and Eggertsdóttir (1999). They maintain that they frequently identified the attitude of teachers as obstructing the development of effective mixed-ability work. A commonly reported constraint was that teachers found it difficult to break away from former habits and adapt to new roles (Eggertsdóttir, 1999; Reid, et al., 1982:55). This highlights questions about the curriculum in small schools and what teaching approaches can be most appropriate in multi-grade classes, both for the benefit of pupils' cognitive and social development.

### 3.2.4 Curriculum and Teaching Approaches in Small Schools

The main purpose of the PRISM<sup>24</sup> project was to describe the curriculum of small schools (Galton, 1990). It examined practice in 168 small primary schools in England, where multi-grade grouping was almost universal. Galton (1990:73) discusses the project and claims that there is no evidence in the data available, which indicate that teachers in small schools neglect areas of the curriculum because of shortage of specialist teaching. On the contrary evidence suggest that teachers in small schools often carry out more activity in these subject areas. What emerges from the study, however, is an apparent lack of planning in the organisation of the curriculum in small schools:

Teachers seemed to choose tasks because they fitted in with a particular topic or theme rather than because they afforded opportunities to practise a particular range of skills in a cross-curricular context (Galton, 1990:73).

Organising curriculum in a small school and teaching in a multi-grade class seems to call for teaching approaches befitting children of different

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<sup>24</sup> PRISM (Curriculum Provision in Small Schools).

ages that are grouped together. Having a class of multi-ages as well as of mixed abilities should present little difficulty for modern methods in teaching, and should encourage teachers to teach students effective study skills. Miller (1989) identifies six areas essential for effective multi-grade teaching: instructional delivery; self-directed learning; planning and using peer tutoring; classroom management and discipline; classroom organisation, and instructional organisation and curriculum. Johnson and Johnson (1994) have shown that co-operative learning approaches provide opportunities to meet pupils' individual needs as well as to develop both academic and interpersonal skills. Moreover, co-operative learning seems to give teachers an opportunity for more meaningful use of time and facilitate intentional interaction with pupils. Slavin et al. (1985) and Johnson and Johnson (1994) argue that such methods create different tasks and reward structures and, consequently, different amounts and kinds of interdependence and social facilitation among the students. Extensive research has shown that co-operative learning, under certain conditions, promotes high achievement outcomes and enhanced social and emotional development (Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Putnam, 1993).

However, collaborative work is rare in the UK and the US (Alexander 1992; Galton et al. 1980; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Putnam, 1993). Bennett (1994:56) found that the social context for learning in the majority of primary schools in Britain is a small group, but the typical group practice is not co-operative. In the USA, Johnson and Johnson (1994) found that of the three most important ways of structuring learning, co-operative learning is currently the least used, or only 7-20% of the time. One way to increase the quality of interaction in the classroom, explored by Galton (1989) and Alexander (1992), is to exploit much more fully the potential of collaborative tasks within groups.

### **3.3 Teacher - Pupil Relationships in Small Schools**

Wenham (1991) maintains that both classroom practice and research show that an effective teaching situation today takes the individual into account and is far more developed and differentiated than direct instruction approaches. Establishing such a way of working depends to a great extent on the interaction between pupils and the teacher. Galloway (1985) argues that effective guidance can create a climate which accepts exceptionality, ensures that the achievements of pupils with disabilities are valued, creates an opportunity for them to contribute, and can be seen to be contributing to the local community.

Tomlinson (1990) carried out a study in which one of the objectives was to find if small rural schools in two Local Educational Authorities in England were educationally sound. One of the findings indicated that there were marked differences between how pupils were approached individually and the care given to their development. Tomlinson argues that:

...the school which achieved most academically was also the most caring and most concerned about the personal and social development of its pupils and most successful at protecting them from physical violence within school and delinquent behaviour outside it (Tomlinson, 1990:295).

Several studies show that in small schools teachers are able to give pupils personal attention and the teacher knows pupils' individual needs. This has been found to be the most significant advantage of small schools. (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987 and 1992; Finch, 1986; 1987; Galton, 1989; Mann, 1996; Miller, 1989; Waugh, 1991). In spite of multi-grade classes in small schools, the small number of pupils can enable teachers to meet individual needs and enhance pupils' participation. This can also include pupils with special educational needs, as the learning environment is adjusted towards meeting each child's potential. Learning and pupils' development can depend on how the teacher manages to achieve good interaction. Forward (1988) points to the fact that the ability to think

independently and to make necessary choices and decisions will depend on the individual's ability to assemble information. This calls for specific learning skills, which can be developed through good relationships between teachers and pupils:

It could be also that the fostering of these investigative and decision-making skills takes place best when sustained, trusting relationship between pupil and teacher develops (Forward, 1988:XV).

Forward (1988) continues by stating that this prolonged contact between an educated adult and a child is one of the characteristics of the small school. He presents his view that the strength of small school lies in a more subtle factor which is less often, if ever, considered and is concerned with the true nature of primary education (Forward, 1988:XV).

### ***3.4 Meeting Individual Needs in Small Schools***

In Tomlinsons' study (1990) small schools holding 100 pupils or fewer were seen as being both advantageous and disadvantageous in the handling of pupils with problems. To their advantage was the favourable pupils-teacher ratio, which meant that these pupils were easily identified at early stage. The difficult child in a small school is more likely to come to the attention of senior staff more readily and teachers can devote more time to the individual. Six schools took part in the study, but only three schools were felt to encourage such intervention, two of which were willing to take in pupils who had had considerable schools problems in other schools, usually a larger one. Where a larger school had rejected pupils, placement in a small school was seen as a way of retaining the pupils in mainstream school rather than placing them in a special school. In the study it was felt that the LEA was not fully aware of this usage of the smaller school.

Small schools should be ideally suited for providing attention to individual differences; they provide more opportunities for children to

learn from each other and to interact in groups of mixed age and ability. Accordingly, there should be an increased probability of effective teacher-pupil interaction in small schools, but little evidence is available in the field:

Comparatively little research has focussed on the experiences of disabled children in rural communities where mainstreaming may be a matter of necessity, thus providing examples of 'natural experiments' in mainstreaming (Hayes and Livingstone, 1986:35)

Hayes and Livingstone (1986) carried out a case study in rural, primary schools in Queensland, Australia. Five children were selected for inclusion in the study. A combination of interviews, observations assessments and analysis was used for collecting data. The purpose of the study was heuristic and, as such, aimed to generate, rather than test, hypothesis. The results showed that several factors relating to the nature of the schools in isolated rural communities might be seen as advantageous for mainstreaming, because they seem to minimise the segregation of disabled children: the course of mainstreaming seems to be less socially difficult; the tendency to have multiple grades in each class facilitates the need to work in a level suited to ones ability; maximises the opportunity to join in all school activities; smaller schools provide greater opportunities for participation and belonging; smaller schools provide a greater sense for respect for school, and smaller schools provide less sensitivity to and evaluation of differences among pupils (Hayes and Livingstone, 1986:45).

In the educational debate in the last decade, the importance of the school atmosphere is frequently referred to for the benefit of learning. Bell and Sigsworth (1987) found the metaphor of family atmosphere in small schools comprising, the view that the relationships which exists between teachers and pupils are more intimate, more personal and less governed by formal rules regulating behaviour than are typical of larger urban schools. Hopkins and Ellis (1991) say that in small schools, there can be a greater ease of communication among members of staff. This usually

not only helps to create a positive atmosphere in the school, but also allows each child's progress to be carefully monitored and discussed on a long term basis:

... since they generally have pupils in their care for a considerable length of time, teachers in small schools can get to know their children better, to build a closer relationship with them and to understand their needs more effectively (Hopkins and Ellis, 1991:117).

If teaching is to be for the benefit of all children, it is necessary to adapt both its objectives and content accordingly, to secure full participation of all pupils in schools.

### ***3.5 Small Schools in Iceland***

In the school year, 1994-1995 there was 201 compulsory schools 'grunnskóli' in Iceland, of which 81 were small schools with less than 100 pupils and multi-grade classes. Although almost half of the compulsory schools in Iceland are small, these schools only represent 9% of pupils in schools at this level in the country (Table 3.1).



Table 3.1 Numbers of Schools and Pupils in Iceland. Number of Small Schools and Pupils in Small Schools in 1994-1995 (Statistic of Iceland, 1996)

Area	Number of schools in each area in Iceland	Number of pupils in each area	Number of small schools in each area	Number of pupils in small schools	% of pupils in small schools in each area	Number of small schools having less than <u>25</u> pupils
Reykjavík	29	13536	0	0	0	0
Southwest Iceland	30	11735	1	16	0,1	1
West Iceland	15	2582	5	265	10	1
West fjords	20	1680	16	591	35	8
Northwest Iceland	19	1796	10	289	16	4
Northeast Iceland	30	4413	17	866	20	4
East fjords	28	2207	19	713	32	9
South Iceland	30	3636	22	983	27	4
Total:	201	41585	90	3723		31

As appears in Table 3.1, there were no small schools in the capital Reykjavík and only one small school in Southwest Iceland, the area closest to Reykjavík. At this time, 35% of pupils in the West fjords and 32% of pupils in the East fjords attended small schools. In all, 31 of all small schools had less than 25 pupils, one school had only one pupil and another school had three pupils and two schools had five pupils. In one county there were nine schools with less than 25 registered pupils. As a result, there may be a considerable difference in the internal organisation of small schools, for instance between schools of 10 and 90 pupils. The most distinguishing feature of the smallest schools may be the very fact of how few the pupils and teachers are.

### 3.5.1 Aims Education in Iceland

The fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone should have an equal access to acquire education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, possible handicap, and cultural or social background (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1995). The role of schools is to prepare pupils for life and work in a continuously developing democratic society. Tolerance, Christian values

and democratic co-operation (Educational Act, No. 49/1995) shall guide the educational methods.

The law concerning schools at the compulsory level stipulates that all children are to receive suitable instruction, taking into account the nature of the pupil and his or her needs and promoting the development, health and education of each individual (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1998:17).

In the most recent National Curriculum (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1999a), it is clearly stated that schools at the compulsory level shall receive all children regardless of their capabilities, their residence or other distinctions such as language, nationality or cultural identity. Furthermore, the curriculum calls attention to the importance of the task at hand for schools and school authorities with regard to delivering the services needed to meet the range of different individual needs children may have, i.e. to provide all children with an education which is suited to their needs.

### 3.5.2 Situation and Responsibility of Teachers in Small Schools

At the primary level (1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade), the same teacher is responsible for one class and teaches his/her class in most subjects. This often results in teachers feeling insecure about some of the subjects they teach (Sigurgeirsson, 1991). The Icelandic Educational System is meant to provide teachers with flexibility and independence (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1995). Official inspection of schools does not exist in the Icelandic school system. Head teacher's autonomy is broad and their management differs greatly from one school to another. In addition, teachers' autonomy is also extensive. In principle, teachers choose teaching methods and the conditions in which teaching takes place. The Ministry maintains that an attempt is made to provide as much variety as possible within the school (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1995:22). This may have positive and negative consequences. Pupils' activities are wholly dependent on the particular teaching strategy each individual teacher decides to develop or adapt. This results in there being great

differences in the approaches applied in Icelandic schools (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1988). A number of factors may affect this, such as available finances, the size of the school, access to professional staff, the organisation of the curriculum, teaching methods adopted and individual teachers' values and beliefs.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Education (1999b), 3.484 teachers were employed at compulsory school level in Iceland in the autumn 1995. Teachers are employed in part-time and full-time positions. Yet, their annual teaching schedule, i.e. the number of hours taught might not always be the same as stated in their contracts. Quite often teachers take on more work than contractually agreed upon, and many teachers work overtime. As a result, a teacher's annual teaching schedule may be heavier than that agreed upon in his/her contract (Table, 3.2).

Table 3.2 Teachers' Yearly Teaching Schedule 1994-1995 (Statistic of Iceland, 1996:286)

Proportion Teaching	Full-time equivalents	Total number male teachers	Total number females teachers	Prop. males in %	Prop. female in %
Under 0,50	98	37	61	4	2
0,50-0,74	307	34	273	4	11
0,75-0,99	585	38	547	4	22
1,00-1,14	759	153	606	16	24
1,15-1,29	748	196	552	21	22
1,30-1,49	696	311	385	33	15
1,50 and over	255	156	99	16	4
Total	3448	925	2523	100	100

In 1994-1995, teaching posts in Iceland, in compulsory schooling, equalled 3448 full time positions. Females outnumbered men in the teaching profession in compulsory schooling, where 73% of teachers were female, but 27% males. Only 22% of Icelandic teachers were employed full time or very near full time (1,00-1,14). It is important, however to remember the common practice of working non-contractual

overtime. The percentage of teachers, who carried out 1.15-1.49 teaching posts, was 42%. It was more common that male teachers work more overtime than female teachers. Teachers holding 1.15-1.49 teaching posts were 55% of males, while 37% of female teachers held equivalent posts. In addition, 17% of male teachers held one and a half post or more, but only 4% of female teachers. Furthermore, 98 teachers or 3% of all teachers held 0.50 positions (Table 3.2).

In the autumn of 1994, as many as 26% of all teachers held 0.50 - 0.99 of a full post, of which the majority were female teachers (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Teachers holding 0.50- 0.99 Positions 1994-1995 (Statistic of Iceland, 1996:286)

Area	Number of male teachers teaching 0.50-0,99 of a full post	Number of females teachers teaching, 0.50-0,99 of a full post	Proportion of male teachers in each area teaching 0.50-0,99 in %	Proportion of female teachers in each area teaching 0.50-0,99 in %
Reykjavík	19	265	7	93
Southwest Iceland	10	198	5	95
West Iceland	5	62	7	93
West fjords	2	44	4	96
Northwest Iceland	4	34	11	89
Northeast Iceland	12	95	11	89
East fjords	9	48	16	84
South Iceland	11	74	13	87
Total	72	820		

The part-time teaching pattern is similar in all the eight counties in Iceland (Table 3.3). In 1999, the situation is still mainly the same (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1999b). It is reasonable to assume that these irregular working hours and large amount of overtime may affect relationships among teachers and consistent co-operation within the schools.

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 include all those employed in teaching in autumn 1995, irrespective of their qualifications. Many of these people lack formal qualifications. According to information from the Ministry of Culture and Education (1999b), as many as 7.7% of those employed in teaching at compulsory school levels were unqualified during the school-year 1994-1995 but the distribution is uneven across the country (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Proportion of Qualified Teachers and Unqualified Teachers in 1994-1995 (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1999b)

Area	Total teaching load supplied by qualified teacher in %	Total teaching Load supplied by Unqualified teachers in %
Reykjavík	99	1
Southwest Iceland	94.80	5.20
West Iceland	87.35	12.65
West fjords	61.42	38.58
Northwest Iceland	71.72	28.28
Northeast Iceland	83.93	16.07
East fjords	82.82	17.18
South Iceland	90.36	9.64
Total	90.29	9.71

When numbers from all parts of the country are examined, it emerges that 9.7% of all teaching during the school year 1994-1995 was carried out by people who were not qualified as teachers. The capital, Reykjavík and towns in the greater Reykjavík area seem to attract most qualified teachers. In Reykjavík, almost all, or 99%, of teaching was carried out by qualified teachers and 95% of teachers in Southwest Iceland were qualified at this time. The direst condition was in the West fjords, where as much as 38.6% of compulsory teaching was carried out by unqualified staff. The situation was also difficult in Northwest Iceland, with 28.3% of all teaching in primary and lower secondary schools carried out by unqualified persons. In Northeast Iceland, as much as 16.1% of the teaching was carried out by individuals lacking teaching qualifications.

The situation shown in Table 3.4 is caused by a general lack of qualified teachers in the country. One may also assume that the low salary scale for teachers has had its effects. It has been particularly difficult to staff schools in rural areas and villages. The problem of employing qualified teachers who have a long-term commitment to the school and live in the local community has been particularly pressing for small schools. It has even occurred that all teachers employed in a small school were unqualified (Þorsteinsson, 1998). Such a situation is bound to have extensive consequences. Educators, who concern themselves with pupils' wellbeing and the internal development of schools, must consider the long-term effects of retaining unqualified teachers.

The lack of qualified teachers in Iceland led Johnsen, Hansen, Sigurgeirsson, Proppé and Bjarnadóttir (1989) to conclude that the shortage of formally qualified teachers was a major problem in rural areas. Where the problem has reached the most serious proportions, only half of the teachers were qualified (Johnsen, et al., 1989:4). In varying degrees the shortage of qualified teachers appears to affect almost all the schools in question. Under such adverse circumstances, it is indeed difficult to organise instruction and to initiate successful staff development. But above all, the situation is likely to be difficult for pupils who have to put up with teachers who have neither the skills, nor the attitude to meet their needs. Teaching, one knows, is a complicated process and without the necessary knowledge and skills it is not possible to provide quality education, or to develop and organise continuous work within the school (Rosenholtz, 1991). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) refer to Grossman (1989) who found that people who have not acquired educational and pedagogical training do not accomplish the more complicated aspects of teaching. They emphasise the importance of intentional training for unqualified teachers. Such training has proved to be very useful (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991). In Iceland, unqualified teachers are not encouraged to obtain formal training or support. Nevertheless, they are expected to deliver a broad and balanced

curriculum. Qualified teachers no doubt give support to this group, in order to help them to come to grips with their work. This kind of support, however, often seems to be of limited use, since the unqualified teachers only have short-term appointments. If a teacher's intention is to teach in a certain school only for a short time it may be expected that he or she will not develop the commitment necessary to develop professional skills, which involves consistent interest in the task at hand and the willingness to participate in collaborative work. Professional fulfilment and self-confidence result from such a commitment (Rosenholtz, 1991). Bell and Sigsworth (1987) maintain that in any educational programme the commitment of the teacher is a fundamental requirement.

The situation of schools in remote areas in Iceland raises questions about professional isolation. First, the schools are often some distance away from other schools and far from the centres from which educational and psychological advisers operate. Teachers working in these schools may find it difficult to attend courses or other professional activities. It might also be difficult for them to be released from teaching because of how few teachers work at each school. In addition, travelling can be difficult during the winter months because of the hard winter and long distances. Having few colleagues and experiencing the lack of professional discourse with teachers with similar subject interests and expertise may lead to professional isolation. This may affect the quality of education delivered to pupils at small schools. Melheim (1998) argues that in Norway, where almost 50% of all schools are small, and geographic isolation is frequently great, it is not necessarily the geographic isolation, which is the definitive factor. Rather, Melheim claims that teachers' isolation is not least due to professional difficulties. He maintains that small schools have only infrequently been included in the educational debate; small schools have first and foremost been included in educational debates in relation to their closure (Melheim, 1998:9).

Teachers in small schools in Iceland, as in all compulsory schools, are expected to adapt teaching approaches to the needs of individual pupils and provide a curriculum that is: broad, balanced, relevant and matched to pupils' abilities and aptitudes according to the task and situation. Teachers are responsible for choosing the appropriate approaches towards these objectives (National Curriculum, 1999). There are examples of such policy being adjusted to the practice of small schools (Skólanámskrá, 1998). However, the situation of teachers in small schools differs from that of large schools because of the small number of pupils and multi-grade classes. Many teachers have to teach many subjects in the multi-grade classroom and in small schools teachers need to be prepared to supervise extra curriculum activities. This can become a problem because it can be argued that Icelandic teachers have not been trained or prepared for teaching under the particular circumstances that exist in small schools. This is so in spite of the high proportion of teachers who are likely to teach in multi-grade classrooms in small schools. Training has until recently only prepared teachers for one-grade classrooms. This problem is recognised in other countries. The lack of training for multi-grade teaching is reported in several studies and reviews on small schools (Bray, 1987; Miller, 1989 and 1994; Roelofs, Raemaekers and Veenman, 1991; Thomas and Shaw, 1992; Veenman, Lem and Roelofs, 1989). It is only recently that courses dedicated to teaching in small schools were included in some teacher training programmes in Iceland. These include, for example modules such as: 'The characteristics and situation of small schools,' 'Multi-grade teaching,' 'Individualistic teaching' and 'Co-operative learning' (Curriculum of the University of Akureyri 1995-1996; Curriculum of the University of Akureyri, 1999-2000).

### ***3.6 Closure of Small Schools***

In 1996, the decision to decentralise Icelandic Compulsory Schools 'grunnskóli,' was made in order to bring decision-making closer to the people. With this change the responsibility of managing the compulsory



schools was transferred from state level to the local community level (Educational Act, 1995). This involved major structural reforms. In connection with these changes, a debate about the viability of small schools was initiated. In spite of a lack of research in the field, some small schools had already been closed down before these changes were implemented. On behalf of the authorities, the debate about closure has not been about whether small schools could provide effective education for the pupils due to their size. Closure seems to have occurred mainly for financial reasons. Since these changes were implemented, schools have increasingly been closed in order to make budget savings. The closure of three schools in Northeast Iceland did however, not lead to any budget savings (Pórðarson, 1996). Professional considerations have not been the motive behind such changes. The 'merging' of several small schools in the West fjords is an example of this kind of reorganisation. Here, one head master was given the responsibility of running several schools, despite there being a considerable distance between them and difficult transport.

The arguments in favour of financial decisions may not necessarily coincide with educational arguments and are liable to regard the individual needs of children. This view is supported by Comber et al. (1981) who found that if decisions are made in narrow financial accounting terms, only some small savings can accrue to the LEA.<sup>25</sup> They also argue (Comber et al., 1981:83) that their research makes it clear that the social and community impacts of the closure of small schools must be seen in the wider context of the process of social change in remote areas, a process within which restructuring of educational services is but one element. In the UK, Hopkins and Ellis (1991) maintain that there has been a consistent argument that small schools are unable to meet the needs of their pupils; that they lack the necessary expertise and that the arrangement of multi-grade classes can put pupils at a disadvantage. However, since the late 1970<sup>s</sup> there has been an

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<sup>25</sup> LEA (Local Educational Authorities).

increasing opposition to these views and a realisation of the damaging effects of the loss of such schools to the local community (Hopkins and Ellis, 1991:116).

### **3.6.1 Effects of School Closure on Pupils**

Forsythe et al. (1983) carried out an investigation in the UK, in areas where small schools had been closed within the last 15 years. He found that the reorganisation of rural schools has social effects, both for the children and for the community at large. The major social effects were lengthened travelling time, to and from school, and increased costs. Children subjected to long journeys appeared to be more vulnerable to difficulties associated with such journeys, such as problems of poor route organisation and long waiting periods. School closures, against the wishes of the community, gave rise to feelings of powerlessness on the part of the local residents; increased the distance between school and community and created a distance with respect to social activities outside the schools (Forsythe, et al., 1983:133-134). The merging of many small schools into one large school has inevitably meant longer journeys for pupils. Melheim (1998) refers to Solstad (1978) who found that school journeys in Norway result in both psychological and physical difficulties, and reduce children's free time. These facts contribute to the importance of making it possible for children to attend school close to their own homes (Melheim, 1998:16). Closure is an issue that can create difficulties for pupils as well as parents. In addition, the threat of closure is likely to affect the climate needed for optimistic and creative work within the schools.

### **3.7 Research on Small Schools in Iceland**

There has been a lack of evidence about the characteristics and situation of small schools in Iceland. The internal work of small schools has been given scant attention. Few studies have been carried out on how teachers plan their teaching, what teaching methods are used in multi-grade

classes and how teachers meet the needs of individual pupils. The same applies to research on teacher-pupil relationships and problems, which may be particular to small schools. Similarly, little is known about relationships with parents or about professional interaction within small schools.

The Icelandic Ministry of Education has published one study of small schools (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990). The study included 56 small schools in Iceland. The study was twofold. Firstly, a questionnaire was sent to head teachers of 56 schools to gather general information about small schools as institutions, i.e. about the facilities of the schools, their position within the local community and several other factors, which would indicate their strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, another questionnaire was sent to the same 56 head teachers as well as to 57 fully employed teachers and to 111 teachers employed on a part-time basis. The aim was to gather information about teachers in small schools, their workload, work conditions and the schools' position within the community. Answers were received from 73% of the head teachers; 56% of the teachers replied, but from only 12.6% of the part-time teachers who were contacted. The low proportion of answers from part-time teachers could be taken as an indication of their lack of commitment to the schools. The results of the study showed that:

- In all 74% of the schools operated for 8 months a year and 19% of the schools operated only for 7 months a year. Only one school operated for 8½ months (n: 42).<sup>26</sup>
- For economic reasons, the younger pupils attended school for a few days a week. In 21% of the schools' 6 years old pupils only attended schools
- For one day a week, other 21% for two days. In nine schools (21%) seven and eight years old only attend school for three days

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<sup>26</sup> When the present research was conducted, schools in towns and some villages operated for 9 months.

a week and in two schools nine years old attend school four days a week (n: 42).<sup>27</sup>

- Only 12% of small schools had their own library and there was a general lack of resources. The head teachers viewed this as a serious problem (n: 42).
- In all 73% of the head teachers said formal meetings with parents were organised. However, co-operation with parents was most often informal, 85% of the heads said that teachers talk to parents when they visit the school for other reasons than formal appointments (n: 40).
- As many as 51,1% of the teachers and head teachers had only taught in schools with less than 50 pupils. Many teachers and head teachers remain in their posts for a very long time, but there were frequent changes of staff, and young teachers tended to leave the schools before having completed 5 years of teaching (n: 84).
- In all 27.9% of the teachers and head teachers did not held a second job apart from teaching, but 52,9% of the respondents held a second job but saw teaching as their main employment. 18,8% of the respondents saw teaching as an extra job (n: 86).
- Altogether 42,3% of teachers and head teachers said that their workload was very high or rather high (n: 83).
- The teaching arrangement was flexible and individual teaching was the most frequent approach (always: 2%, most often: 18%, and sometimes: 67%). Pupils often seemed to choose their topics themselves (n: 87).
- As many as 46% of the teachers and head teachers in the study taught two-three grades together. Teaching four grades together was carried out by 24% of the respondents, 13% of the schools provide traditional one grade teaching and as many as, 18% said they most often taught five grades together (n: 80).

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<sup>27</sup> At the same time, young children (6-9 years), living in towns and villages, attended school every day.

- Teachers and head teachers claimed they had very good possibilities (35%) or good possibilities (36%) to evaluate pupils development. As many as, 18% thought this rather difficult or very difficult (8%). Young teachers and teachers teaching a few hours a week say they find difficult to evaluate pupils' development (n: 84).
- Teachers said they were always (40%) or most often (30%) able to evaluate pupils' learning abilities. They claimed this was difficult because they lack the experience (n: 83).
- Half (50%) of the respondents organise curriculum on a yearly base and 11% of respondents said they organise their teaching on a monthly base
- The respondents reported that pupils work in groups according to ability. The frequency of group work was; most often (12%), sometimes (26 %), seldom (17%), 45% claim that group work never occurs (n: 59).

The authors (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990) point out that their study show examples of good planning and teaching in many small schools. They, however conclude that too many teachers did not prepare their teaching sufficiently, that teachers were not aware of the advantages of small schools and did therefore not make use of the possibilities these schools presented. The authors claim that it is important to increase teachers' knowledge of the advantages of mixed-grade teaching and the possibilities of having few pupils in a class (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990:70).

The problems that appear in the research results of Harðardóttir and Magnússon (1990) seem serious. There are several factors that inhibit effective schoolwork. In addition to a lack of resources, which seems to keep younger children away from schools for a considerable amount of time and many schools from operating during the full school year, it is evident that there is also a lack of professional skills and a lack of

devotion to teaching. One indication of this is that in spite of the low numbers of pupils in each classroom, many teachers in the survey claim they find it difficult to evaluate pupils' learning abilities or progress. Over half of the teachers in small schools hold a second job. There are many part-time teachers who may be only loosely connected to the schools and there are frequent changes of staff, with younger teachers only remaining a few years within the same school. In addition, there are many unqualified teachers in small schools in Iceland.

Another study on small schools carried out in Iceland in 1995 showed that there are small schools where the development of the possibilities particular to small schools is taking place (Sigþórsson, 1995).

Sigþórsson (1995) compared small primary schools in Iceland and England in the context of management of primary schools and of school development. He interviewed five head teachers in each country (Sigþórsson, 1995:22). Sigþórsson (1995) maintains that some of the Icelandic head teachers he interviewed are playing a pioneering role and raising standards of small schools in the country. He found these head teachers to have a clear vision of how they want their school to develop and to be influential in developing the school's vision and policy. Moreover, they all play a significant role in the community, as relationships with parents and governors are an important part of their jobs. However, Sigþórsson (1995) argues from three sets of findings that there are notable differences between the school systems in England and Iceland, and that Icelandic head teachers seem to be less involved in curriculum planning than their English colleagues.

Despite clear progress being made in several areas in Icelandic education, it is nevertheless apparent that the overall educational development has been slow. In the seventies an extensive effort was brought about to change the educational system in Iceland with a large-scale curriculum project which aimed at total revision of the compulsory curriculum, both its practice and content. The reform was stopped early

in the eighties by a new Minister of Culture and Education (Sigurgeirsson, 1991). Sigurgeirsson, who has studied educational reform in Iceland in the context of curriculum content and classroom activities, maintains that an effort to stimulate instructional change has, until recently, been limited since the seventies. He argues that classroom instruction is dominated by “passive individual seatwork, rote-learning<sup>28</sup>, recitation and various forms of textbook teaching” (Sigurgeirsson, 1999:5).

It may be argued that this situation has prevented teachers’ in meeting pupils’ individual needs and therefore influenced all children. In recent case studies on the situation of disable pupils conducted in the country side in Iceland, it emerged that pupils are welcome and accepted in the schools and teachers seem to take good care of their pupils. However, the results showed pupils’ learning procedure appeared to be disorganised. This seems to indicate that the pupils have had the opportunity to participate socially, but the schools seem not to be characterised by intentional professionalism (Marínósson and Traustadóttir, 1993).

Changes were difficult to apply in schools in Iceland in the eighties. The external change following the decision to decentralise Icelandic compulsory schools in 1996 did not necessarily involve internal changes within the schools. This is well known in other countries (Hammersley, 1983). Cohen and Manion (1981:3) argue that the characteristic of education in the western world has been its fitful and uneven progress. They claim that this has attributed in the main to great a dependence on authority and experience as means of advancement and a corresponding reluctance to apply the principles of social science to educational issues.

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<sup>28</sup> The term ‘rote learning’ means: a) the use of memory usually with little intelligence. b) routine or repetition carried out mechanically or unthinkingly, a joyless sense of order and rote.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In order to make it possible to look at small schools in Iceland from a broader perspective, in this chapter, a review of research on small schools in other countries was outlined.

The strengths of small schools include a low ratio of pupils per teacher and the opportunity to provide each pupil with personal attention (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987 and 1992; Galton, 1989; Galton and Patrick, 1990; Forward, 1988; Mann 1996; Miller, 1989; Waugh, 1991). In small schools teachers have the possibility to identify pupils' needs at an early stage (Tomlinson, 1990; Waugh, 1991). A close teacher-pupil relationship has been found the most significant advantage of small schools (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987). This enables teachers to consider pupils' individual differences (Galton and Patrick, 1990; Waugh, 1991). The family-like atmosphere in small schools can provide security and create the opportunity for a holistic teacher-pupil relationship. It is through this interpersonal relationship within the small school that teachers get the opportunity to know pupils more intimately, know their interests and particular abilities as well as difficulties (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Forward, 1988; Galton and Patrick, 1990; Hayes and Livingstone, 1986; Waugh, 1991). This greater ease of communication among members of staff allows for each child's progress to be carefully monitored and discussed on a long-term basis and helps to understand pupils' needs more effectively (Hopkins and Ellis, 1991). It has been found that in small schools inclusion is less socially difficult; small schools provide less sensitivity to and evaluation of differences among pupils; pupils' opportunity to join in all school activities is maximal and smaller schools provide greater opportunities for participation and belonging (Hayes and Livingstone, 1986).

Research show that the advantages of small schools include the cultural, social and economical benefits for a community in retaining its own school and a greater sense for respect for the school (Bell and Sigsworth,



1987; Hayes and Livingstone, 1986; Melheim, 1998). Co-operation with other schools can enrich the curriculum and widen the social circle of the pupils. The small school can draw upon the expertise within the community, including parents, to enrich its curriculum (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Hayes and Livingstone, 1986; Melheim, 1998; Waugh, 1991). In small schools there are opportunities to develop a strong school ethos, detailed knowledge of pupils and families; and there are opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to develop socially, build up confidence and independence through being assigned numerous tasks of responsibility in a variety of activities (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Forward, 1988; Galton and Patrick, 1990; Hopkins and Ellis, 1991; Mann 1996; Miller, 1989; Waugh, 1991).

However, research has revealed that teachers find classroom management more difficult in multi-grade and mixed ability classes (Eggertsdóttir, 1999; Reid et al., 1981; Veenman et al., 1987). The teaching in multi-grade classes calls attention to the importance of a curriculum that offers opportunities for pupils to practice a range of skills in a cross-curriculum context (Galton et al., 1991; Malmros and Norlén, 1984; Miller 1989; Pratt, 1986; Veenman, 1995 and 1996; Waugh, 1991). This requires knowledge about suitable approaches for teaching in multi-grade classes as well as a thorough knowledge about individual needs (Galton, 1989; Miller, 1989; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Nordahl and Overland, 1992; Veenman et al., 1987). The presence of multi-grade classes should be a challenge for teachers to apply modern teaching methods befitting children differing in age and ability, methods that make available pupils' educational, social and emotional development (Veenman, 1995).

Problems of small schools may relate to the limited number of teachers, the costs and that they may be socially limiting (Galton and Patrick, 1990). This may involve difficulties to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and the narrow mix of children may create few opportunities for pupils to be engaged in different activities (Galton and Patrick, 1990).

It has been revealed that small schools in rural districts seem in particular to face problems of limited resources, geographical spread and difficulty in the recruitment of teachers and administrators. Having few colleagues and experiencing the lack of professional discourse with teachers with similar subject interests and expertise may lead to professional isolation (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991).

Although Harðardóttir and Magnússon (1990) pointed out that their study on small schools in Iceland showed examples of good planning and teaching, they found that there are several factors, which inhibit effective schooling. Among these are: a lack of teachers' professional skills; a lack of devotion to teaching; the shortage of qualified teachers; the high mobility of staff and teachers that have not been trained for the particular circumstances that exist in small schools like multi-grade teaching (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990). Johnsen et al. (1989) found that the shortage of qualified teachers affect almost all schools in Iceland. This situation may influence all children, including children with disabilities. Nevertheless, it has been found that some head teachers in small schools in Iceland are playing a pioneering role and raising standards of small schools in the country. They have a clear vision of how they want their school to develop and are influential in developing the school's vision and policy (Sigþórsson, 1995). Moreover, Marinósson and Traustadóttir (1993) found that disabled pupils are welcome and accepted in schools in the countryside in Iceland but pupils' learning procedures appeared often to be disorganised.

In this chapter the advantages and disadvantages of small schools were revealed. To develop a further framework of the situation of small schools in Iceland the following questions about teachers' beliefs will be addressed in the forthcoming chapters:

How do teachers in small schools make use of the advantages of small schools; the low number of pupils per teacher, the opportunity to build up close teacher-pupil relationships and co-operation among staff?

What is teachers' understanding of children with special educational needs? How does the low teacher-pupil ratio and close relationships enable teachers to consider pupils' special educational needs? What are the procedures for those pupils in the small schools?

How is the curriculum in small schools organised and managed by teachers and head teachers? Are there clear aims and co-operation among staff on how pupils' individual needs should be considered?

What are the teaching approaches in small schools? Do teachers adapt teaching approaches appropriate for multi-grade classes, methods that allow for pupils' participation in a variety of activities in order to improve their learning, their social skills as well as personal development?

Do the close community links in small schools encourage teachers to co-operate with other schools and to obtain detailed knowledge from parents about pupils in order to enrich the curriculum?

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### *4.1 Introduction*

The preceding review of the literature includes the three main areas upon which the thesis draws: teacher-pupil interaction, pupils' individual needs, the nature of small schools, as well as an exploration of a number of theories and developments in these fields.

We have seen that small schools can by their nature create a good environment and opportunities to foster close relationships (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Forward, 1988; Galton, 1989 and 1990; Hopkins and Ellis, 1991). The multi-grade classes and few children in small schools can promote recognition of diversity, which again facilitates individual attention. From this, the learning environment for each child may benefit. In other words, it should become less problematic to consider pupils' individual needs. Yet, it has also become evident that research on the work of small schools is, generally speaking scant, not least in relation to pupils with special needs (Hayes and Livingstone, 1986), and in Iceland almost non-existent. Little is known about how teachers plan their teaching, what teaching methods are used in multi-grade classes and how teachers meet the needs of individual pupils. The same applies to research on teacher-pupil interaction and problems, which may be a distinctive feature of small schools. Similarly, little is known about relationships with parents or about professional interaction within small schools. Almost the only study (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990) on small schools in Iceland showed examples of good planning and teaching in many small schools. However, the authors argued that there were several factors which inhibit effective schoolwork in these schools; too many teachers did not prepare their teaching sufficiently; teachers were not aware of the advantages of small schools; teachers lacked knowledge of the advantages of multi-grade teaching and the advantages of having a low number of pupils in a class. Therefore, they did not make use of the

possibilities these schools offered (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990). In addition, many teachers in small schools in Iceland lack formal qualification, many of them hold down a second job, also many part-time teachers appear to be loosely connected to their schools and there are frequent changes of staff, with younger teachers only remaining a few years within the same school.

It may be argued that this situation has prevented teachers' from meeting pupils' individual needs and that may also have adverse influence on children with disabilities as well as all the others. From recent case studies on the situation of disabled pupils one can gather that these pupils are welcome and accepted in the schools and teachers seem to take good care of them. However, the results of this same study showed that the pupils' learning procedure appeared to be disorganised. This seems to indicate that the pupils have had the opportunity to participate socially, while the schools seem not to have adopted intentional professionalism (Marínósson and Traustadóttir, 1993).

Cohen and Manion (1981:3) argue that the characteristic of education in the western world has been its fitful and uneven progress. They claim that this has contributed to great a dependence on authority and experience as means of advancement and a corresponding reluctance to apply the principles of social science to educational issues. Bearing in mind the uniform bases of school systems in the western world, one certainly hopes, that the results of the present study will not only enhance our understanding of schools in Iceland, but benefit researchers in other countries in their investigations of this same or other related issues.

This study centers on the practice and perceptions of teachers in small schools in Iceland and in what way this particular feature may differ from what transpires in large schools. In addition, the effects of a closer teacher-pupil interaction, measured outcomes in learning and empathy, will be examined. The purpose of the study is twofold:

To gather data about small schools, their characteristics and situation, such as: the influence of the limited number of pupils per teacher, the teacher-pupil relationships, the opportunity for pupils' participation in a variety of activities, and for teachers to adapt interaction and teaching approaches suited to the needs of all children. To gain insight and understanding of teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom, and how teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as their perspectives and choices affect pupils' learning.

By necessity, this chapter will now consider research methodology and principles of data collection.

#### ***4.2 Educational Research***

Those who study classroom teaching and learning have become increasingly conscious of the complexity of classroom life and of the difficulties of making helpful prescriptions for it. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) relate how, until the 1950s, research into teaching tended to be of two kinds. Firstly, methods experiments were carried out, where comparison was made of different recipes for teaching particular subjects or topics, or managing classrooms. Secondly, there was a search for the personal characteristics of the 'good teacher.' By the 1960<sup>s</sup> it was increasingly recognised that teaching could neither be described nor prescribed in terms of anything as simple as standardised methods. Good teachers could be distinguished only by the conduct of their teaching, not by any kind of distinctive personality profile, and to understand teaching one needed to study what happened in the classroom. The dominant model of the 1970<sup>s</sup> was a process-product model, which aimed at examining pupils' outcome along with classroom activities. Cooper and McIntyre (1996:3) maintain that classroom research should first and foremost be concerned with the way in which teachers and pupils try to achieve success in their teaching and learning. This consideration may be a starting point for generating hypotheses about effective classroom practice. Secondly, the authors claim it is through knowing the thinking

that underlies teachers' and pupils' practices that it will be possible to theorise about the limitations of current classroom practice. This reflection can be the base for educating teachers and for the planning of curriculum and other development of classroom practice.

Several types of methods can be used to research school life. *Descriptive studies* can describe a structure, activity, change over time or relationship to other phenomena. Another type of studies involves *prediction*. These are studies that accrue data about factors that predict students' success or identify students who are likely to be unsuccessful. Another type of educational research could be to identify *interventions* or factors that can be transformed into intervention, e.g. to improve students achievement (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). According to Gall, Borg and Gall (1996), the most important type of educational research is *explanation* because it can subsume the other three. If researchers are able to explain educational phenomena, it means they can describe it, can predict its consequences, and see possible interventions. From this process we can develop a theory.

#### **4.3 Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Methodology**

Quantitative research tries to describe and explain features of the social environment by collecting numerical data on observable behaviours and by subjecting these data to statistical analysis (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996:767). Qualitative research, on the other hand, tries to develop knowledge by primarily collecting verbal data through intensive studies of cases and then subjecting these data to analytic induction (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996:28). Qualitative research can involve a collection of a variety of empirical methods: case studies, personal experience, introspections, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts– which describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:2). Individual studies can involve both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies derive from different philosophical assumptions. Quantitative methodology derives its philosophical basis from positivism and the natural sciences, while qualitative methodology tends to be hermeneutical or phenomenological. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996:28) maintain that this latter type of research is grounded in the assumption that features of the social environment are constructed as interpretations by individuals and that they tend to be transitory and situational.

Discussions of the appropriateness of mixing quantitative and qualitative methods are prominent in the methodological debate. Bogdan and Biklen (1981) warn against the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. They refer to the different assumptions behind the approaches and say that studies that try to combine them produce studies in methods rather than on the topic chosen. Bryman (1984) explains two levels of controversy within the methodology; the technical and the epistemological, and argues that the epistemological differences, which characterise each methodology, must not be confused with the technical differences each approach represents.

Kuh (1993) refers to Rossman and Wilson (1991) who stresses the importance of being “shamelessly eclectic” in mixing methods. Employing quantitative procedures allows the researcher to identify patterns, which may be contained in large amounts of information, more quickly. He does however acknowledge the limits of this methodology and refers to Peshkin (1988) who claimed that using:

...quantitative data analysis procedures limits the investigator's capacity to understand the nature, meaning, and impact of the information, the natural by-product of joining personal interpretations as one analyzes the data inductively (Kuh, 1993:300).



In a typical inductive approach, it may be claimed that analysing meaning starts at the beginning of the research process and lasts throughout.

Positivism may be characterised by its claim that natural science provides man with its clearest possible ideal of knowledge, but positivism is less successful in its application to the study of human behaviour.

...the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world. This point is nowhere more apparent than in the context of classroom and school where the problems of teaching, learning and human interaction presents the positivistic researcher with a mammoth challenge (Cohen and Manion, 1981:8).

Researchers need to find a middle course between the ideal procedure they would wish to employ, and the approach which is most feasible in terms of resources, as well as the most appropriate and least disruptive for the subjects of the study. Cohen and Manion (1981) argue that in looking at classrooms and schools one needs to be concerned with developing wide-ranging conceptual weaponry to observe, analyse and think about what goes on in such a context.

...with seeking greater understanding of the issues involved; with arriving at explanations for teacher and pupils behaviour; with identifying causes and consequences of actions: ...and with establishing a more secure knowledge base on which to conduct the profession of education (Cohen and Manion, 1981:2).

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have a role to play in theorising. Thus, the issue is how they might work together to foster the development of theory.

## **4.4 Quantitative Methods**

### **4.4.1 Questionnaires**

Surveys are one of the most commonly used descriptive methods in educational research. Their purpose is to provide or obtain accurate quantitative descriptions of aspects of people or things at a particular point in time with a certain intention in mind:

- (a) describing the nature of existing condition, or
- (b) identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or
- (c) determining the relationships that exist between specific events (Cohen and Manion, 1985:94).

Thus, descriptive surveys are essentially ‘fact’-finding and descriptive, although the data collected is often used to make predictions (Oppenheim, 1992). Surveys can provide a simple frequency count or a more complex relational analysis. The respondents control the data-collection process, because they fill out the questionnaire at their convenience, answer comments, they can skip questions or even give a unique response (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996:289).

Questionnaires have the advantage that it is possible to reach respondents in a widely spread geographic area, the cost of data collection is relative low and the time required to collect data is little compared to other methods like e.g. interviews. Some of the disadvantages of postal questionnaires reported by Oppenheim (1992) are:

- generally low response rates, and consequent biases;
- no opportunity to correct misunderstandings or to probe, or to offer explanations or help;
- no control over the order in which the questions are answered, no check on incomplete responses, incomplete questionnaires or the passing of questionnaires to others (Oppenheim, 1992:102).

In addition to these disadvantages of self-completion questionnaires, a low response rate or poorly defined concepts or wording might cause complications. This might be because the sequence of questions is confusing and respondents might seek help elsewhere or even have questions answered. Therefore the researchers should collect evidence that all the respondents share the same understanding of the topic. It is also possible to establish whether the respondents are stating their true opinions by determining whether they express similar opinions on other measures of the same construct (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996:291).

#### 4.4.2 Systematic (Non-participants) Observation

Systematic observation may be defined as a particular approach to quantifying behaviour, which is usually concerned with naturally occurring behaviour observed in a naturalistic context (Bakeman and Gottman, 1994). By systematic observation procedures, the observer intentionally avoids taking part in any of the ongoing activities, but investigates these activities through the use of preconstructed categories and uses of quantitative measures. This means that information irrelevant to these predetermined categories is not systematically coded.

Bakeman and Gottman (1994:11) use the term sequential approaches for those approaches that examine the way discrete sequences of behaviour occur. Normally this means that sequential approaches are concerned with the way behaviour unfolds in time, as a sequence of relatively discrete events, usually on a moment-by-moment or event-by-event basis. Bakeman and Gottman (1994) describe mutually exclusive codes (one code is associated with the particular event) and mutually exhaustive codes (some code for every event). To explain, one category may be appropriate for each 1-minute sample, but all time samples could be categorised. Such coding schemes may have several desirable features. For instance, their construction requires a certain amount of conceptual analysis and therefore they may simplify data analysis (Bakeman and Gottman, 1994:33).

An appropriate coding scheme is the single most important element of an observational study. Developing an appropriate scheme may be hard and should involve informal observation and discussions as well as several refined versions of the coding scheme (Bakeman and Gottman, 1994:46). Oppenheim (1992:159-161) explains that the measuring instrument needs to behave in a fashion, which is consistent with itself and means that a very high proportion of the score on every occasion is due to the underlying scale variable, with a minimum of error. If differences are found between readings on the same instrument on two separate occasions, or when applied to two different objects or respondents, it must be certain that these are genuine differences or changes in the subject of measurement, and not differences which can be attributed to inconsistencies in the measuring instrument or to changes in the attendant conditions.

Criticism connected with predetermined categories is that such a system may not easily fit different conditions (McIntyre and Macleod, 1993), or there may be a lack of connection between single codes. Hargreaves (1975) claims that interaction analysts are compelled by their method to ignore much of the elementary teacher-pupil interaction and to lose the detail of interaction. The method may lack the concern for the particular as well as lacking spontaneity. This is in accordance with Hamilton and Delamont's (1984) criticisms of systematic classroom observation, which they say only illustrates the 'average' or 'typical' classroom, rather than actual situations. Moreover, they maintain that the approach ignores the temporal and spatial context in which data is gathered, with the result that little is learned about physical settings, and that the focus is on overt and observable behaviour, which means that meaningful behaviour is lost from view (Burgess, 1986:181).

It may be asserted that systematic observation may fail to provide valid evidence about the actions of the subject of study, which are not obvious to the observer. This is another general criticism, reported by McIntyre and MacLeod (1993). It is always problematic to take into account the

meanings or mental activity that those who are being observed dedicate to their interaction. Therefore, it may be maintained that one will always be left with important questions about what determines the actions.

Becker (1971) wrote about these obstacles when observing classrooms and maintains that it is not necessarily the methods that keep people from seeing what is going on. He argues that it is:

...first and foremost a matter of it all being so familiar that it becomes irresponsible to single out events that occur in the classroom as things that occurred even when they happen right in front of you (Becker, 1971:10)

Delamont (Burgess, 1984) has suggested strategies to avoid this.

Different kinds of classrooms need to be examined, as comparative studies may provide a stimulus to looking at familiar settings. Familiar aspects of schooling should not be taken for granted but used as a basis for questioning the procedure.

The shortcomings of systematic observation give rise to questions about the possible uses for this approach. Systematic observation may be needed to quantify events or behaviour, and thus provide information for testing a hypothesis. This makes statistical analysis possible; and the testing of validity of the generalised data as well as specific aspects of events or behaviour may be explored. To test the accuracy of the observation, the observers' agreement may be tested and feedback between observers may be applied. To avoid missing details in the behaviour of the subject that is being observed, different observation methods might be necessary as this provides an opportunity to focus or distinguish between different sets of events. Kvale (1989) states that interviewing may normally be an important and integral part of observation studies and MacIntyre and MacLeod (1993) emphasise that different sets of events need to be related. During systematic observation, the observer is concerned with the objective reality of activities, but this does not mean that he is not able to observe subjective meanings. He may be able to categorise classroom events on the basis of

the shared meanings within a culture. According to symbolic interactionism people focus on the world of subjective meanings and the symbols by which meaning is produced and represented, and are keen to explore the properties and dimensions of these processes (Woods, 1979).

Quantitative approaches are ideal for objective measurement, representative samplings, experimental control and the use of statistical techniques to analyse data. They offer the possibility to choose from a range of methods, such as surveys, interview schedules and structured observation. However, they may suffer from disadvantages, such as low response rate, lack of opportunity to correct misunderstanding, lack of concern for the particular, and temporal and spatial context. They tend to illustrate the average rather than actual situations and assume that social reality is relatively constant across time and settings.

## **4.5 Qualitative Research**

### **4.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest (Kvale, 1996:14).

This human interaction is designed to establish knowledge about how people understand the world, about their beliefs and actions. Cohen and Manion (1985) refer to Cannel and Kahn (1968) who have defined interviews as a conversation between an interviewer and participants initiated by the interviewer in order to obtain research-relevant information according to specified research objectives. However, the interview is not only a device for gathering information. Woods maintains that an interview is “a process of reality construction to which both parties contribute and by which both are affected” (Woods, 1996:53). Oakley (1981) who argues against the notion that interviewing can be a one-way procedure, with the interviewer withholding her own views and resisting involvement, supports this view. She strongly resists

the attitude, which relegates interviewees to a narrow objectified function as 'data.' Oakley is referring to the relations that is an integral part of human interaction. This interaction is not simply based on stimulus response mechanism, it involves interpretation of meaning as theorised by Mead (1934) that is meaning arising out of the social interaction that one has with ones' fellows, and human beings define each other's actions based on these meanings.

Individual interviews vary according to content, such as seeking factual information, or opinions or attitudes, or narratives and life histories (Kvale, 1996:101). An interview as a research tool may range from structured interviews, in which questions are asked and the answers are recorded on a standardised schedule, through less structured interviews in which question may be modified or added; to entirely informal interviews based on key issues raised in a conversational way (Cohen and Manion, 1985:291).

Highly *structured interviews* are most commonly used in professional surveys. According to Wilson (1996:100-101) the ideal structured interview schedule consists of standardised questions. The context and procedure of the method of asking questions is also standardised by the interviewer introducing the research purpose in the same way, and by using the same approach to the respondents. There is an assumption that all respondents will understand the questions in the same way.

Using a standardised schedule can leave the interviewer in a dilemma (Wilson, 1996:100). It can be complicated for the interviewer to appear as natural as possible and be encouraging, because of how highly controlled and directed the interview is. The interviewer needs to be sensitive to the respondent's understanding of the questions asked, and be willing to elaborate or prompt in order to ensure that this understanding is genuine. To ensure the latter, it is essential that prompts are used, both verbal and non-verbal. Nevertheless, this can lead to a paradox. Interviewers must probe to ensure a full understanding of a

question, but even if they follow the best practice in non-directive prompts and non-directive body language, prompts of any sort mean that that an additional question has been asked.

Wilson (1996:117) maintains that the opposition between structured and unstructured methods of data is in many ways a false one; all are structured, but in different ways. The most one can claim is that there are degrees of structure in all methods of asking questions.

Kvale (1996) explains that *semi-structured* interviews differ from structured interviews in that there is certain openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions. It comes close to conversation but it involves a specific approach and technique of questioning. An attempt is made to obtain detailed description of various aspects of the interviewees' world as well as description of specific situations and actions as well as the meaning of the described phenomena. The interviewer may follow an interview guide that focuses on certain themes that may include suggested questions. This requires a high level of skill in the interviewer, who needs to know the research topic thoroughly and be familiar with the methodological options available.

The interviewer must be flexible, if not he will either prejudice the continuation of the interview or bias the responses, which are, obtained (Wilson, 1996:100).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) claim that in order to understand behaviour we must use approaches that give us access to the meanings that guide that behaviour. An interview may provoke anxiety and defence mechanism for both partners. It may also evoke positive feelings of common interest. Interview statements may be contradictory or ambiguous. Therefore the interviewer needs not only to listen to explicit descriptions and meanings. Non-verbal messages should also be considered. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer certain flexibility, which may be helpful under sensitive situations that may arise during an interview.



Cohen and Manion (1985) cite Borg (1963) and say that the direct interaction of the interview both has its advantages and disadvantages as a research technique. It allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection, but is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer, because of the human interaction that is inherent in the interview situation.

For the purpose of a reasonably documented and logically coherent analysis of interviews, Kvale (1996:211) emphasises the importance of formulating explicitly the evidence and arguments that enter into an interpretation, so that it can be tested by other readers. He argues that there are multiple questions that can be posed in a text, with different questions leading to different meanings of the text. Kvale (1996) clarifies three different interpretation contexts:

*Self-understanding*: attempts to formulate in a condensed form what the subjects themselves understand to be the meaning of their statement. The researcher then tries to keep to the interpretation that is within the interviewee's context of understanding as seen by the researcher.

*Critical Common-sense Understanding*: which may include a wider frame of understanding, and may focus on either the content of a statement or on the person making it. This may lead to enriched or amplified interpretations.

*Theoretical Understanding*: which means incorporating a theory of an individual or an acknowledged theory to the interpretations. This implies that the theory needs to be valid for the area studied, the context may also be further differentiated or they may also merge into each other (Kvale, 1996: 214-217). Kvale (1996:212) claims that several interpretations of the text is not a weakness but a richness and strength of interview research.

Qualitative research does not aim at quantification or obtaining general opinions. A qualitative interview seeks to obtain factual descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees as well as the meaning of the

described phenomena. An attempt is made to obtain detailed description of various aspects of the interviewees' world as well as description of specific situations and actions. It allows for a wider frame of understanding of meanings, and may amplify interpretation.

#### 4.5.2 Field Notes

In order to avoid losing details or to get hold of the particular, field notes may be recorded, when observing classroom interaction, because field notes may give an access to the meaning that guides behaviour. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996:250-252) explain that field notes should be descriptive and reflective. Descriptive information includes verbal description of the participants, reconstruction of dialogues, description of the physical situation and explanation of events. Reflective information, on the other hand, involves the researchers' personal account of the course of inquiry. This information needs to be detailed and concrete. Consequently, it is necessary to avoid vague field notes and generalisation. The effects of the observer during the course of study should be described. An observer might overestimate or underestimate effects or what is observed. These effects or reactions should be estimated. For this, the researcher should use established procedures for validating and verifying data analysis.

Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) give an account of three approaches in order to analyse field notes: interpretational analysis, structural analysis and reflective analysis. When applying structural analysis the researcher searches for patterns inherent in discourse, text, events or other phenomena. This is in contrast to interpretational analysis, where inference is needed and the data are closely examined in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that may describe phenomena.

## **4.6 Ethics**

The main ethical principle in research has to do with the behaviour of the researcher, who has to act in ways that are ethically acceptable. This involves: informed consent, not harming the respondents as a result of their participation in the research, and respecting their right to privacy. Another basic ethical principle in research concerns the handling of findings. Punch (1986) suggests that researchers need to exercise common sense and moral responsibility: “to our subjects first, to the study next and to ourselves last” (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

Data collection may be regarded as a transaction in which it is usually fairly obvious that the researcher stands to gain. On the other hand the respondent seems to be asked to give time, thought, privacy and effort. Anything that will make this transaction less unequal and one-sided will help the quality of responses (Oppenheim, 1992:82). Negotiating access is a balanced act (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). When negotiating access the researcher needs to give clear information about the research, its aim and process, and the strict confidence in treating data. However, there may be reasons for not telling everything about the research beforehand. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) claim that often it is neither possible nor desirable to spell out in full the purposes of the research right from the start as respondents might refuse access in a way that they would not do later on in the work. The reason for this may be that the researcher cannot know exactly everything that can happen during the process. Secondly, some sort of information given in advance might affect people’s behaviour in ways that could invalidate the research.

There may also be ways of pursuing inquiry that are unacceptable and some results may have to be suppressed.

Labels and theories provide a way of seeing. But a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing. There are stock responses, and there are also stock perceptions. What we see is frequently influenced by what we know (Eisner, 1991:67).

Seeing and perceiving is both a cognitive and a psychological process, influenced by ones' knowledge, attitudes and perceptions. An important ethical issue can be the justification of the publication of findings. The researcher can acquire information that can cause embarrassment or distress if published. For instance, in small communities, certain information reported can be recognised by others. An example of this could be a quoted description in a text. By such means, confidential information could be revealed. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:280) argue that some data can be centrally relevant, but still the results have to be suppressed for ethical reasons. Moreover, they maintain that there are some materials that are always confidential to the researcher and permanently lost from view for the same reasons (Burgess, 1988, cited by Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:282).

#### ***4.7 Reliability and Validity***

The concepts of reliability and validity have a kind of a holy status within the world of sciences. Teachers have expressed the continuous struggle to internalise the definition of the two concepts, possibly because they do not belong to everyday discourse, but rather to another and more abstract sphere. This abstract sphere is created and lies within the positivist tradition. Altheide and Johnson (1994:487) argue that the traditional criteria of methodological adequacy and validity were formulated and 'owned' by positivism, the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological perspective that has justified the use of quantitative methods in research for most of the twentieth century.

The perspective includes the common assertion that 'reliability' or the stability of methods and findings, is an indicator of 'validity' or the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings (Altheide and Johnson, 1994:487).

Conventional positivist social science applies four criteria to disciplined inquiry.

*internal validity*, the degree to which findings correctly map the phenomena in question;

*external validity*, the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred;

*reliability*, the extent to which findings can be replicated, or reproduced, by another inquirer, and;

*objectivity*, the extent to which findings is free from bias (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:100).

However, the received positivist views have come under considerable attack. Kvale (1996) explains how some qualitative researchers have a different attitude towards questions of validity and reliability. He claims that these are “simply ignored or dismissed as oppressive positivist concepts that hamper a creative and emancipatory qualitative research” (Kvale, 1996:231). Kvale (1996) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985), who claim that these paradigms are unable to deal with the issues surrounding the various dimensions of inquiry. They have reclaimed ordinary language terms to discuss the truth-value of their findings, using concepts such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

This is an attempt to demystify the concepts of reliability and validity, to bring them back to everyday practice. According to a dictionary, validity refers to the state of being logical, sound or effective, because something is done or made with the correct procedure (Longman Webster, 1984). Kvale (1996) argues that this process depends to a great extent on the researcher and points out his or her responsibility:

Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings (Kvale, 1996:241).

And Kvale (1996) continues:

The craftsmanship and credibility of the researcher becomes essential... Validity is not only a matter of the method used; the person of the researcher, including her moral integrity, is critical for evaluation of the quality of the scientific knowledge produced (Kvale, 1996:241-142, citing Salner 1989 and Smith, 1990).

Several aspects might affect the validity of the research. The respondents may be reliable or unreliable evaluators of their own behaviour or understanding. They may be resistant towards talking about themselves or about various issues. They may be hesitant in describing in detail phenomena or even deny certain aspects of their understanding, or they may even exaggerate. One way to avoid bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular reality is to employ more than one method. The more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher's confidence. Kvale (1996) refers to Runyan (1981) who discusses in detail the credibility and strength of different interpretations. This includes checking the empirical evidence for and against an interpretation, examining the theoretical coherence and critically evaluating and comparing the relative plausibility.

#### ***4.8 Interdependence of Theory and Method***

The main method of interactionist research is that of participant observation, which involves taking part in the ordinary life of a group or institution. It enables analysis of the interplay between 'I' and 'Me' and 'others' within the self (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). It is, in other words, an analysis of one's own reactions, motives and intentions. This may invite the risk of being too involved and consequently of losing the perspective of the researcher. Therefore, some researchers have favoured non-participant observation. "This, together with the informal, unstructured interview, has been the most commonly used method" (Woods, 1983:16). Woods (1983) argues that it is often difficult to analyse thoughts and actions, but close observation and sympathetic interviewing, preferably over a lengthy period and in a variety of contexts, can bring the researcher close to the core of social interchange.

Symbolic interactionism does not represent a unified perspective to all those who subscribe to that approach. It does not embrace a common set of assumptions and concepts. However, symbolic interactionists identify three basic assumptions, which the approach emphasises (Blumer, 1969:80-81; Cohen and Manion, 1985:34-36; Woods, 1979:15-16):

Human beings act towards things on the basis of the *meanings* they attribute to. Man inhabits two different worlds: the 'natural' world wherein he exists as an organism of drives and instincts, and where the external world exists independently of him, and the social world where the existence of symbols, like language, enables him to give meanings to objects. This interpreting of meanings is what makes him distinctively human and social. Interactionists therefore focus on the world of subjective meanings and the symbols by which they are produced and represented. This means not making any prior assumptions about what is going on in an institution, and taking seriously, indeed giving priority to, inmates' own accounts. Thus, if pupils appear preoccupied, for too much of the time, with 'being bored', 'mucking about', 'having a laugh', etc. the interactionist is keen to explore the properties and dimensions of these processes.

This attribution of meanings to objects through symbols is a continuous *process*. Action is not simply a consequence of psychological attributes such as drives, attitudes, or personalities, or determined by external social facts such as social structure or roles, but results from a continuous process of meaning attribution which is always emerging in a state of flux and subject to change. The individual constructs, modifies, pieces together, and weighs up the pros and cons and bargains. This process takes place in a *social* context. Each individual aligns his action to that of others. He does this by 'taking the role of the other', by making indications to his 'self' about the 'other's' likely response. He constructs how others wish or might act in certain circumstances, and how he himself might act. He might try to 'manage' the impressions others have

of him, put on a 'performance', and try to influence the other's definition of the situation.

These assumptions raise questions concerning how teacher-pupil interaction may affect pupils' learning. Pupils interpret their own actions, school processes and teachers' behaviour. Their interpretation may affect their learning. They make indications of things in the environment that guide their actions. This refers to anything they are conscious about. These self-indications occur in a continuous flow or a process. This is the mechanism that is involved in interpreting others' actions and gives the act its meaning in Mead's (1934) words "to make it into an object." Symbolic interactionists use the term object to figure out the way in which people perceive and act upon the environment. Accordingly, pupils live in a world of objects, of symbolically designated things, ideas, people and activities that embodies their purposes and experiences. Step by step, the pupils note, assess and give meaning to the situation in which they are acting, and events in the environment become visible or tangible. The pupils become able to act in response, accept, reject or transform in accordance with the way they define or interpret. The activities and intentions of acting human beings shape the very nature of the human environment. This plan of action does not exist in a pre-established form. Perceptions of an object have telescoped in it a series of experiences, which one has if he carries out the plan of action toward an object (Hewitt, 1997:41, citing Meltzer, 1972:15). The very important point is, that this process takes place in a social context where the pupils align their actions to the action of others by interpreting and finding out what they are doing or what they intend to do. This happens through "taking the role of others".

Teachers are the personal symbols in the educational process. The way teachers act and their perceptions influences pupils. In this personal relationship teachers may allow themselves to be receptive human beings. Their non-verbal and empathetic behaviour is characterised by subtle interpersonal interaction to which pupils are sensitive. Rogers



(1980) found that when certain measures are applied in teaching, an ease of interaction is facilitated. These measures are empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. He maintained that interpersonal relations called 'empathic' are extremely important both for the understanding of personality dynamics and for effective changes in personality and behaviour. Empathy is the desire to recognise the full, present and changing consciousness of another person, of reaching out to receive his or her communication and meaning, and of translating words and signs into experienced meaning that matches at least those aspects of their awareness that are most important to them at the moment (Rogers, 1980:143-144, citing Barrett-Lennard, 1962). In the classroom, this would also imply the teacher being conscious of what is 'behind' pupils' outward communication. Such interaction, based on understanding of meanings, may be beneficial for all children but not least children with disabilities, as they may need increased attention. The lower pupil-teacher ratios in small schools may give greater opportunity for joint pupil-teacher participation in a variety of activities and potentially create closer relationships, where both partners share interests, reactions and experiences. The Icelandic school system provides an opportunity for teachers' autonomy, which should make it possible for them to make use of the advantages of small schools. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) claim it is through knowing the thinking that underlies teachers' and pupils' practices that it will be possible to theorise about the limitations of current classroom practice and this may be a starting point for generating hypothesis about effective classroom practice.

In the light of the above theory (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Rogers, 1980), the following assumptions are made for this study:

It is important to determine how teachers may make use of the advantages of small schools, such as the limited number of pupils per teacher, the opportunity to build closer teacher-pupil relationships, the opportunity for pupils' participation in a variety of activities in order to improve their social skills and personal development, and for teachers to adapt interaction and teaching approaches suited to the needs of all

children. It is important to understand the nature of interaction in the classroom, the dynamic activities taking place between teachers and pupils; what are the subjective meanings and the symbols teachers produce and represent, and what are the dimensions of these processes. It is important to understand how teachers' non-verbal and empathetic behaviour during classroom interaction may affect pupils' learning.

In this study it was decided to combine quantitative and qualitative methodology. As Cohen and Manion (1981:27) maintain, the best way forward lies in the careful use of both quantitative and qualitative methods with a view ultimately to synthesising their outcomes into a more comprehensive whole. In this study, quantitative data may help to describe the nature of small school, identify patterns and determine relationships or differences that may exist between schools. Qualitative data, on the other hand, can be wide-ranging conceptual weaponry to observe, analyse and think about what goes on in schools. It may help to understand in more depth the nature of teachers' understanding of their own behaviour, as well as the meaning and impact of this behaviour. It may help in seeking better understanding and explanations of teacher-pupil interaction, identifying causes and consequences of actions and thereby establishing a more secure knowledge base.

Thus, both quantitative and qualitative data may help to explain how teachers try to achieve success in teaching or obtain effective classroom practice. By collecting data about the thinking that underlies such practice it may be possible to suggest theories about the advantages and limitations of classroom practice. By explaining classroom practice it is possible to describe, predict and see possible interventions. Thus, the data may become a base for planning curriculum and other development of classroom practice. For this purpose, the research methods and techniques considered relevant for the study were as follows.

#### 4.8.1 The Postal Questionnaire

To describe the characteristics and situation of small schools in Iceland, and to determine relationships that may exist within the schools, it was decided to use a postal questionnaire (Appendix III), followed by a statistical analysis of the answers received to the questionnaire. The data was meant to identify teachers' views on educational and pedagogical features of small schools. In order to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter and to discover how teachers may make use of the characteristics of small schools, mentioned in the assumption in the foregoing section, the following sub-questions were designed:

The questions were aimed at describing teachers' perspectives of teacher-pupil interaction, learning difficulties and individual needs; at obtaining information about how teachers in small schools approach pupils' special needs, and how they may utilise the positive aspects of the low teacher-pupil ratio in order to meet pupils' individual educational needs.

The questions focussed on whether teachers collaborated on a regular basis; found support in other teachers, and how this collaboration was organised, if it existed. This included how pupils' special needs are considered in teachers' collaboration.

The questions focussed on links between practice in the school and the home. The questions were designed to find out if teachers encouraged parents to be in contact with the schools and how teachers thought they could make use of the information provided by parents in the learning situation.

It was seen of importance to understand the way in which teachers view the curriculum, both its design and implementation, in order to ascertain whether small schools represent special practice. A range of options

within the curriculum, as a basis for special needs support for individual pupils, was considered.

The study explained multi-age grouping and how this arrangement affects the teaching. Accordingly, it was of interest to know if teachers believe certain teaching approaches are especially appropriate in small schools and how this might relate to pupils' individual needs.

The questions also dealt with pupils' achievements and how progress is monitored, and whether there existed a clear policy within the school of monitoring pupils' progress.

The questions aimed at understanding what channels are in place to meet teachers' needs for support from services and from other teachers.

#### 4.8.2 The Observation

To quantify teacher-pupils interaction, it was decided to apply systematic observation in ten small schools and ten large schools in Iceland. The aim was to capture contingent aspects of teachers' interaction with the pupils; their non-verbal and empathetic behaviour, task-related interaction, co-operative interaction and self-directed activity. The measuring instrument was a systematic observation scheme (Appendix VI), coding their non-verbal behaviour and tone of voice.

A coding scheme was developed for observing two aspects of non-verbal behaviour: body messages and voices messages. Coding categories that could be defined in terms of observable and concrete features were developed to 'see what is there'. Five codes were defined for body language and four codes for voice messages. The following were codes for body language: availability, body posture, physical openness, facial expression and appropriate use of touch. The codes for voice messages were: use of voice, volume, articulation and vocal expression. The codes were built on Nelson-Jones' (1993; 93-96) Lifeskills Helping Model and his definition of body messages, Egans' (1985) definition of attending

behaviour and Rogers' (Rogers, 1980:143-144, citing Barrett-Lennard, 1962) understanding of empathetic behaviour.

#### 4.8.3 The Field Notes

Along with the systematic observation it was decided to record events and comments during lessons. The field notes were meant to be additional sources of information used to support and explain the other data. The intention was to gather, both descriptive and reflective information. Descriptive information includes verbal description of the participants, reconstruction of dialogues, description of the physical situation and explanation of events. Reflective information, involves the researchers' personal account of the course of inquiry, detailed and concrete. Vague field notes and generalisation will need to be avoided as well as it is necessary to validate and verify the data analysis.

#### 4.8.4 The Interviews

It was decided to carry out interviews with twenty teachers in large and small schools, the teachers where the systematic observation would be conducted. To allow for certain openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions, the format of the interviews was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer certain flexibility, which may be helpful under sensitive situations that may rise during an interview. It can be difficult to analyse thoughts and actions, but close observation and sympathetic interviewing can bring the researcher close to the core of social interchange (Woods, 1983).

The interviews aimed at gaining information concerning teachers' understanding of interaction in the classroom and obtaining teachers' definitions of issues related to interaction and empathy. Moreover, the aim was to gain information about how teachers believe they affect pupils through interaction, both verbally and by their non-verbal behaviour. Obtaining information about issues related to organisational

aspects; teaching methods and co-operation within the schools were also part of the data collection.

The intention was to obtain factual descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees as well as the meaning of the described phenomena. Thus, an attempt was made to obtain detailed description of various aspects of the interviewees' world as well as description of specific situations and actions.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

...as long as a new construct has only the single operational definition that it received at birth, it is just a construct. When it gets two alternative operational definitions, it is beginning to be validated. When the defining operations, because of proven correlations, are many, then it becomes reified (Cohen and Manion, 1985:255, citing Boring,

A topic needs to be approach in various ways, which allows for different descriptions of the central topic. As a means of checking data against those from another, information will be gathered by questionnaires, systematic observation, field notes and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, findings, which will be gained from using observation, will be checked in the interviews, and also by analysing the results from the questionnaires.

Semi-structured interviews will be used to verify the findings of the observations and the questionnaires, and vice versa. This helps the analyses of similarities and differences in the findings, and the understanding of their implications. This may also enable a comparison between interaction style and whether the size of schools is reflected in teachers' behaviour in the class, and their answers in the interviews. To test the understanding of one respondent against another a comparison

may be made on the interaction style and if schools size were reflected in teachers' behaviour. Conducting the research in schools of different sizes makes it possible to check whether the findings from small schools were replicated in large schools, and vice versa.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITUATION OF SMALL SCHOOLS IN ICELAND - STUDY I

#### *5.1 Introduction*

There are few studies of small schools<sup>29</sup> in Iceland. All teachers in the country are expected to provide a curriculum that is broad, balanced, relevant and tailored to pupils' abilities and aptitudes (National Curriculum, 1999). Meeting these demands requires teachers' to organise teaching according to pupils' individual needs in multi-grade classes and to understand and deal with relationships in such small units.

This requirement raises several issues, such as the training of teachers for multi-grade classes, the organisation of school curriculum, the adaptation of practices for teaching and teacher-pupil interaction. In the Icelandic educational system, all pupils are entitled to equal access to education. This includes pupils with various disabilities. The low number of pupils in small schools should give teachers the opportunity to provide individual attention and take into account individual differences. The presence of multi-grade classes in small schools should stimulate teachers to apply appropriate modern teaching methods to children differing in age and ability, methods that are likely to enhance pupils' educational, social and emotional development. Moreover, research has shown that in small schools there are opportunities to develop strong school ethos and detailed information on pupils and their families. A family-like atmosphere in small schools can create the opportunity for a desirable holistic teacher-pupil relationship, in the educational, social and emotional sense. The small school can also draw upon the expertise within the community, including parents, to enrich its curriculum. Forming co-operation among staff and networks with other schools can prevent the lack of professional support and isolation in small schools.

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<sup>29</sup> In this study small schools are referred to as schools with less than 100 pupils.



In the light of the many advantages of small schools in other countries, the limited amount of research on that topic in Iceland has brought to light several inhibiting factors for effective schoolwork. The problems may relate to the physical geography of the country, as well as social and educational issues, such as the training of teachers for multi-grade classes, and their classroom performance and the organisation of school curriculum. Good practice within small schools, as in all schools, seems for example, to depend upon clear aims, educational management, co-operation among teachers, and approaches suitable to multi-grade classes. The way schools and classes are organised and managed by teachers and head teachers, the atmosphere created through interaction and understanding of pupils' individual needs may be crucial. Educators concerned with the design and implementation of programmes for pupils with special needs may ask what programmes and condition in small schools are well suited to meeting the needs of all pupils and in what way teacher-pupil interaction may facilitate learning within these particular circumstances. Therefore the overall question of this study is how the educational and pedagogical features of small schools may create practice that is well suited to meet the needs of all pupils.

## ***5.2 The Aim of the Study***

The aim of this study was to describe small schools in Iceland in order to identify teachers' practice and views of small schools, especially relating to children with special educational needs.

Teachers' responses to the following themes were examined:

1. Small schools in Northeast Iceland in terms of situation and characteristics.
2. Teachers' understanding of pupils' individual needs.
3. Teacher-pupil relationships within small schools.
4. Teachers' use of parents' knowledge about their children.
5. Teachers' collaboration within small schools.
6. Teaching approaches and arrangement in multi-grade-classes.

7. The organising and implementation of the school curriculum.
8. Development in small schools and their use of support services such as psychological services and special educational support.

### **5.3 Method**

#### **5.3.1 Small Schools in Northeast Iceland**

It was decided to send a questionnaire to all small schools (less than 100 pupils) in Northeast Iceland. As explained in Chapter 3, small schools in Northeast Iceland are widely spread over an area of 19.160.km<sup>2</sup>. The circumstances of these schools are diverse, both in regard to weather conditions and the size of the area, which they serve. In January 1995, when the study was conducted, there were 30 compulsory schools in Northeast Iceland, 17 of which were small schools. The total number of pupils enrolled was 4413. Of these, 865 pupils were enrolled in small schools, or 1/5 of the pupil population (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Small Schools in Northeast Iceland, Number Pupils, Age and Teaching Staff, in the School Year 1994 –1995 (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1994)

Sch.	Number of pupils in the school	Average number pupils per full-time teacher	Pupils age range	Number of teachers teaching full time	Number of teachers teaching 50% - 87% time	Number of teachers teaching 10%-50% time	Teachers' average ratio of full-time teaching
1	10	4.2	6-12	1	2	0	2.4
2	13	6.5	6-12	2	0	0	2.0
3	13	6.5	6-12	2	0	0	2.0
4	32	8.0	6-12	4	0	0	4.0
5	36	8.4	6-12	3	1	2	4.3
6	40	10.8	6-12	3	1	0	3.7
7	42	9.1	6-16	4	0	2	4.6
8	47	8.0	6-13	4	1	4	5.9
9	49	8.0	6-12	4	0	7	6.1
10	59	10.0	6-16	5	1	0	5.7
11	61	9.1	13-16	4	3	2	6.7
12	62	11.7	6-12	3	2	3	5.3
13	64	7.1	6-16	6	4	1	9.0
14	66	11.0	6-16	5	1	3	6.6
15	81	7.8	6-12	6	6	1	10.4
16	94	11.8	6-16	7	1	1	8.0
17	96	12.5	6-16	6	2	1	7.7
Total	865			69	25	27	94.4
Average		9.2					

As shown in Table 5.1 the situation of small schools not only differs in regard to number of pupils, but also the number of teachers and their pupil-teacher ratio. On average there were very few pupils per teacher in the small schools (9.2). The smallest school in Northeast Iceland had only 10 pupils, but was well staffed with one teacher employed full-time and two part time teachers, giving the ratio 4.2 pupils per full-time teacher. Although there seemed to be many teachers, often they worked only a few hours so pupil-teachers ratios were higher than at first seems. The possible effect of the high number of part-time teachers and unqualified teachers is discussed in Chapter 3.

Pupils' age range in the small schools varies. Some schools cover the age range 6 to 12 years, others 6 to 16 years and at one school there were only pupils aged 13-16 years old.

Pupils with special needs were present in all schools in the area. In the school year 1994-1995, 631 pupils were reported to have special needs in the schools in the area. Some of these pupils had severe disabilities (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Pupils with Special Education Needs in Northeast Iceland, in 1994-1995 (Educational Office North East Iceland, 1996)

Issues	Number	%
General learning difficulties	203	32
Specific learning difficulties	83	13
Physical disabilities	27	4
Social and emotional difficulties	90	14
Reading difficulties	102	16
Immigrants	10	2
Other difficulties	116	19
Total:	631	100

Of the children reported to the Educational Authorities, as having special educational needs, in all 155 (24.6%) were said to have been provided with individual educational programmes (Educational Office North East Iceland, 1996).

### 5.3.2 Teachers in Small Schools in Iceland

In the school year 1994-1995, the Total number of teachers in Northeast Iceland was 410 (Educational Office, Akureyri, 1998). The Ministry of Education gave somewhat different information. The Total number of qualified teachers was said to be 322 (79.3%) and the number of teachers without formal qualification was 84 (20.7%). When considering the number of positions held, these number changes slightly, with 83.9% of all teaching in the area carried out by qualified teachers, but with 16.1% of the teaching carried out by teachers without formal qualification (Ministry of Culture and Education, 1999b). This means that there are many teachers without formal qualification, but the position they hold is often part time.

Table 5.3 Number of Teachers in Northeast Iceland, in 1994–1995 (Educational Office, Akureyri, 1998)

Gender	In Akureyri				Outside Akureyri			
	Number teachers employed full-time, or more	%	Number teachers employed part-time	%	Number teachers employed full-time	%	Number teachers employed part-time	%
Female	67	60	60	86	71	54	69	69
Male	44	40	10	14	58	46	31	31
Total:	111	100	70	100	129	100	100	100

As may be seen in Table 5.3, there are 181 teachers teaching full and part-time in primary and secondary schools in Akureyri, which is the biggest town in the area. All in all, 111 (60%) were employed full-time or more but many taught part-time, i.e. 70 teachers (40%). A similar pattern was found outside Akureyri. Of all the 410 teachers in the area, 41% taught part time with 31% female teachers and 10% male teachers. Only seven teachers in the small schools were qualified as special education teachers, two of whom were head teachers and one was on a sabbatical leave during the year the Study I was carried out.

In the school year 1994-1995, teachers in small schools in the area were 121, with almost equal numbers of female (54%) and male teachers (46%). Of those, 69 teachers were employed full time (57%), while 25 teachers (21%) were employed in 50%-86% part-time positions. In addition, 27 teachers (22%) taught less than 50% of a full time position (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Teachers' Teaching-Schedule in Small Schools, in 1994-1995 (Educational Office, North East Iceland, 1996)

Number of pupils in the school	Number of schools	Number of pupils	Teachers teaching full time	%	Teachers teaching 50%-86% time	%	Additional teachers, teaching < 50% time	%
5 – 20	3	36	5	7	2	8	0	0
21 – 40	3	108	10	14	2	8	2	8
41 – 60	4	197	17	25	2	8	13	48
61 – 80	4	253	18	26	10	40	9	33
81 – 100	3	271	19	28	9	36	3	11
Total:	17	865	69	100	25	100	27	100

Many of the part time teachers taught only few hours a week in the schools or from 6-38% of full time positions. Their average teaching time was 18% of full time. In the group of schools with 41-60 pupils, there are very many part time teachers (<50%), or 13 teachers in only 4 schools (Table 5.4).

### 5.3.3 Questions used

The structure of the questionnaire was intended to reveal teachers' views on educational and pedagogical features of small schools. The statements/issues used in the questionnaire were designed to discover the main characteristics and situation of small schools. They were arranged according to the following variables: the characteristics of small schools, collaboration, co-operation with parents, curriculum, teaching methods, teaching arrangements, pupils progress, teaching preparation, collaboration with the schools, collaboration with LEA, school development and attitudes. Statements/issues on pupils' individual needs were included in the variables in order to obtain information about the respondents' repetition and perception of children with special needs.

Before the questionnaire was fully designed, a series of statements/issues were developed by using Likert scale. It was determined which statements/items had the highest correlation with the aims and the theory of the study. The statements/issues that passed this check were included in the rating scale. Most of the statements were closed, with a five-point

response scale used; *strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree*. Other statements had a different scale: *always, often, occasionally, seldom, never*. In addition, some open-ended questions were included to create more flexibility and to allow for clarification in responses.

Likert scale was chosen because respondents can explicitly understand it and the scale discriminates well between respondents' perceptions; their degree of agreement or disagreement (Alreck and Settle, 1985). The format of the Likert scale is straightforward and flexible. The statements can consist of few words or several lines, depending on what is appropriate. It is easy to interpret and has minimal response bias (Alreck and Settle, 1985). A five-point scale was chosen because it allows the respondents to respond neutral on a topic. However, the main advantage of the scale is the ability to obtain a summated value (Alreck and Settle, 1985). Based on the aim of the study, it was assumed that a Likert scale would help to successfully generate the data. The questionnaire is shown in Appendix III.

#### 5.3.4 Procedure

A pilot study was carried out. First, three peers, who had taught in small schools, completed the questions. This was a useful exercise. These teachers' experience in small schools became apparent and resulted in several changes to the questionnaire. A second pilot, carried out by five teachers in a school of 207 pupils, gave some indications about questions that did not work.

It was decided to distribute the questionnaire to all teachers employed in more than 50% posts. Altogether these were 94 teachers and head teachers. Of these teachers, 74% were employed full time and 26% part time (50%-86% of full position). The study was conducted in January 1995. The questionnaire was distributed to all small schools in Northeast Iceland with less than 100 pupils, altogether 17 schools. Included was a

letter to all head teachers in the schools and to the eventual participants (Appendix II), as well as a permission to carry out a research issued by the Educational Office. This was followed up by a phone call to ask head teachers to encourage teachers to participate in the study.

### 5.3.5 Analysis

Questionnaire responses were coded and entered in a SPSS data structure. The SPSS programme (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used. The independent variables were designation, gender, length, of teaching experience, and size of school. Relationships between these variables and between various issues that the study aimed to explore, such as “meeting individual needs” and “curriculum”, were examined. Gamma is one of many ordinal measures of association for ordered categorical variables. The dependent variables in this study were all ordinal variables in Likert scales. Gamma will was used to measure association between designations. The stronger the relationship, the larger is the absolute value of the measure. Significant values of Gamma are reported in the results along with the results. The small sample in this study places some constraints on interpretation. It is essential to consider how such a sample may influence the analysis.

The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed according to the following independent variables: Characteristics of small schools; teacher-pupils relationships; relationships with parents; relationships with colleagues; meeting individual needs in small schools; the school curriculum; teaching approaches; preparation and teaching arrangement; material and conditions; school development and external support.



## 5.4 Results

### 5.4.1 Respondents and the Schools

Fifty-five staff in small schools responded to the questionnaire in time, or 60% of the total number of those who were contacted. One questionnaire was received after the deadline and this was not included in the analysis. The respondents were head teachers, class teachers, unqualified teachers, subject teachers and special teachers (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 Number of Respondents and their Designation

Designation	Number of responses	%	Females %	Males %
Head Teachers	13	24	5	18
Class Teachers	18	33	26	7
Unqualified Teachers	12	22	13	9
Subject Teachers	8	15	9	6
Special Teachers	4	7	7	0
Total:	55	100	60	40

Altogether, 33% of the responses were received from class teachers who were responsible for one class, and 15% of the respondents were subject teachers who taught their subjects in more than one class. Thirteen (76%) out of seventeen head teachers in small schools in the area responded to the questionnaire (Table 5.5). More head teachers were male than female, they were 18% of the sample. All the special teachers, employed as such answered the questionnaire ( $n = 4$ ). The proportion of unqualified teachers responding was high, or 22% of the respondents (Table 5.5), which was higher than the average number unqualified teachers in the area that year (16%) (Table 3.4). This is very close to the real figure for small schools in Northeast Iceland (21%), so the sample is representative.

Responses were received from all the seventeen schools, which can be categorised by size (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Responses according to School Characteristics

Size of school according to number pupils	Number of schools in the sample	Number of staff in the sample	Number answers received	Number answers received in %	Number responses in % for each category of schools
5-20	3	7	7	13	100
21-40	2	12	7	13	58
41-60	5	23	18	33	78
61-80	4	28	14	25	50
81-100	3	28	9	16	32
Total:	17	98	55	100	

The fullest response came from the smallest schools and the lowest from the largest schools in the sample. All teachers (100%) in the smallest schools responded to the questionnaire (13% of all responses received). Fewer answers were received from the teachers in the largest schools (81-100 pupils). Only nine teachers (32%) in the largest schools answered the questionnaire, or 16% of all answers received (Table 5.6).

Table 5.7 Teachers' Years of Teaching Experience

Respondents' years of teaching experience	Female	%	Male	%	Total	%
1-5	6	18	4	18	10	18
6-10	9	27	4	18	13	24
11-15	5	15	4	18	9	16
16-20	5	15	4	18	9	16
21 years or more	8	25	6	28	14	25
Total:	33	100	22	100	55	100

Male teachers in the sample had slightly more teaching experience compared with female teachers, (64% of them had taught more than 11 years, against 54% of the female teachers). More female teachers were recently employed or 45% against 36% male teachers (teaching experience 1-10 years) (Table 5.7). It emerged that teachers' teaching experience was different with regard to designation (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Teaching Experience according to Designation

Respondents	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21 or more	Total
Head Teachers	0	0	2	3	8	13
Class Teachers	3	6	5	2	2	18
Unqualified Teachers	7	3	0	1	1	12
Subject Teachers	0	3	2	2	1	8
Special Teachers	0	1	0	1	2	4
Total:	10	13	9	9	14	55
%	18	24	16	16	25	100

Seven out of ten respondents who had taught less than 5 years were unqualified, or 58% of unqualified teachers. Three of the unqualified teachers had taught between 6 and 10 years, always in the same school. Two of these teachers who did not have formal qualifications, had taught sixteen years or more. Most head teachers had a long teaching experience (62% > 21 years) (Table 5.8).

The teachers had either been in the same school for a short time or a very long time: 38% of them had only been in that particular school less than 5 years and 30% of them had been in the same school over 20 years (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 Teaching Experience in the current School

Respondents' years of teaching in current school	Female	Male	Total	%
1-5	14	13	27	49
6-10	8	3	11	20
11-15	4	1	5	9
16-20	3	2	5	9
21 or more	4	3	7	13
Total:	33	22	55	100

There seems to be a frequent change of staff in the small schools in the area. As many as 49% of the teachers in the whole sample had been teaching in the current school for less than 5 years (69% had taught less than 10 years in the same school) (Table 5.9). Some respondents had experience from teaching in a large school, 25% of men and 22% of women.

As shown in Table 5.10 most of the respondents taught full time (73%). This is a higher percentage than the overall full-time teaching in the area (Table 5.4). Some teachers (11%) said they taught overtime, and 16% of the respondents said they held a 50-80% teaching position (Table 5.10). This is also lower than the overall part time teaching in the area (Table 5.4).

Table 5.10 Teachers' Time Schedule (n=55)

	Number of respondents	%
Working full time (100%)	40	73
Working overtime (> 100%)	6	11
Working 50–80% time (part time)	9	16
Total:	55	100
Holding a second job:	24	44

It is worth noting that 44% of the respondents claimed they held a second job, besides teaching. Of these, 27% of were women and 16% were men.

#### 5.4.2 Characteristics of Small Schools

One of the main aims of the study was to discern the characteristics of small schools. All the respondents agreed that small schools are unlike large schools (Q 12). According to their answers, the primary characteristics of small schools are threefold: *a close relationship with pupils and staff, multi-grade grouping and more attention given to individuals*. In an open-ended question (Q 11), teachers were free to express their views on the main characteristics of small schools. The advantages are presented in Table 5.11 and the disadvantages in Table 5.12.

Table 5.11 Teachers' Views on positive Characteristics of Small Schools

Advantages of small schools	% of respondents
Closer relationships, teacher-pupil/pupil-pupil	79
Multi-grade grouping	74
Individuals get more attention	43
Closer relationship with parents	28
A family-like atmosphere	19

Table 5.12 Teachers' Views on negative Characteristics of Small Schools

Disadvantages of the small school	% of respondents
Professional isolation	15
Lack of resources	13

In the two tables above (Table 5.11 and Table 5.12) it appears that teachers were more likely to indicate positive than negative features of small schools. They most often mentioned close relationships (79%) and multi-grade grouping (74%) as the main positive characteristics of small schools. Moreover, the respondents claimed that individuals receive more attention (43%). Many other issues were mentioned as positive features of small schools, but by less than 10% of the respondents.

Among the issues raised was the point that teachers had an overview of all activities within the small school; management was more flexible; food was provided for all pupils; behaviour problems were hardly to be found, and all pupils participated in the schools' activities.

Of the negative features of small schools, professional isolation was mentioned most often, but only by 15% of the respondents, while 13% claimed the schools lacked the necessary resources.

#### 5.4.3 Teacher-Pupil Relationships

When asked if the small community within the small schools promote close relationships, answers corresponded to the claims made by respondents about the characteristics of small schools. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (73%) strongly agreed that small schools offered a close teacher-pupil relationship (Q 20) (Table, 5.13).

Table 5.13 Close Teacher-Pupil Relationship in Small Schools (n=54)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Total %
Head Teachers	12	82	18		100
Class Teachers	18	69	26	5	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	54	46		100
Subject Teachers	8	100			100
Special Teachers	4	75	25		100
Total in %		73	25	2	100

As may be seen in Table 5.13 all the subject teachers strongly agreed that small schools promote a close teacher-pupil relationship, while only just half (54%) of the unqualified teachers strongly agreed this was true (Q 20). Nevertheless, the difference that appeared between different teachers' responses is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.435). The results seem to clearly support the proposal that teachers believe that small schools promote close relations between teachers and pupils.

A slightly different pattern emerged when teachers were asked if the small school facilitates pupils' relationships (Q 22) (Table 5.14)

Table 5.14 Close Relationships between Pupils in Small Schools (n=53)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	11	55	18	18	9		100
Class Teachers	18	39	22	11	11	17	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	85	15				100
Subject Teachers	8	50	50				100
Special Teachers	4	75	25				100
Total in %		57	24	7	6	6	100

As shown in Table 5.14, most of the subject teachers (85%) and the special teachers (75%) strongly agreed that the small community promotes close relationships but class teachers held a noticeably different view. Only 39% of them felt that small schools facilitated such

relationships (Q 22). However, this different response is not statistically significant (Sig. Gamma = 0.249). The results (Table 5.14) give a clear support for the idea that teachers believe in small schools as a way to ensure better inter-pupils relations. All of the subject teachers, unqualified teachers and head teachers agreed this was true. However, a significant group of class teachers disagreed. These were teachers in the bigger small schools and the reason for this may be that the schools are too large for close pupils inter-pupils relations.

Taking this analysis further, when teachers explained what makes a good relationship in small schools, they saw several issues having an effect (Q 23), as illustrated in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15 Issues promoting good Relationship in Small Schools (n=46)

Issues	Number of responses	%
Children in multi-grade groups learn and play together	37	80
Toleration – older pupils take care of the younger ones	7	15
Gender does not create a problem	6	13
Pupils are personally related and close	6	13

Multi-grade groups seem to have their advantages and they are seen to be promoting good relationships. As many as 80% of the teachers who responded to this question said that multi-grade grouping promoted a good relationship (Table 5.15). Other issues were mentioned as promoting a good relationship (responses less than 10%). These were issues like: pupils have few but loyal friends; cliques are seldom formed and bullying cannot escape the teachers' attention.

#### 5.4.4 Relationship with Parents

Most respondents also thought that there is a close relationship with parents in small schools. But again, class-teachers had a different view from other respondents in the sample (Table 5.16).

Table 5.16 The small Community promotes close Relationships with Parents (n=53)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	11	64	36				100
Class Teachers	18	32	21	26	10	11	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	46	38	8	8		100
Subject Teachers	8	75	25				100
Special Teachers	4	50	25	25			100
Total in %		49	29	13	5	4	100

When teachers were asked if they thought the size of small schools facilitates a close relationships with parents (Q 21), only 53% of class-teachers strongly agreed or agreed that this was the case, while all the subject teachers and the head teachers thought so (100%), (Table 5.16). Although, this difference is not statistically significant (Sig. Gamma = 0.465), the results (Table 5.16) give a clear support for the idea that teachers believe that small schools ensure better relationship with parents. All of the head teachers, subject teachers and most of the unqualified agreed this was true. However, a significant group of class teachers disagreed.

Most respondents (76%) reported that they always or often encourage parents to contact the teachers in small school (Q 30) (Table 5.17).

Table 5.17 Parents are encouraged to contact the Teachers in Small Schools (n=53)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Total
Head Teachers	11	27	27	46	100
Class Teachers	18	47	32	21	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	69	8	23	100
Subject Teachers	8	50	50		100
Special Teachers	4	75		25	100
Total in %		51	25	24	100

However, as appears in Table 5.17, just over half (54%) of the head teachers indicated that they encouraged parents to contact teachers in the



school. The teachers, who most often seemed to encourage parents to contact teachers in small schools, were special teachers (always, 75%), class teacher (79%) and unqualified teachers (always 69%) (Table 5.17). Although, the teachers' responses to the question were different to some degree, the difference is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.069).

On the other hand, teachers seem not to have problems in contacting parents to seek informations about their children. As illustrated in Table 5.18, many teachers said that they did not contact parents to obtain information from them about their children (Q 31).

Table 5.18 Teachers contact Parents to seek Information about their Children (n=53)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Total
Head Teachers	11		46	45	9	100
Class Teachers	18	5	32	52	11	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	8	39	38	15	100
Subject Teachers	8	12	50	38		100
Special Teachers	4		50	50		100
Total in %		6	40	45	9	100

Only 6% of the respondents said they always contacted parents to seek information about the children, 40% said this is often the case and as many as 45% of the respondents said this happens only occasionally (Q 31) (Table 5.18). Although there is a difference between various teachers' responses, this is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.443). However, the answers give some indication that teachers in small schools hesitate to obtain information from parents. This is not in coherence with other results in this study. There are several indications that relationships between parents and the school could be successful. In Q 21, it emerged that many teachers thought that the small community promotes close relationships; most of the respondents (75%) said they always or often encourage parents to contact the school (Q 30) and over half (51%) of them said they agreed that it was necessary to obtain information from parents about their child (Q 35). It did not seem to be

enough to encourage parents; an initiative from teachers seemed to be needed. This seems not to happen, and the information channel between teachers and parents appears to be limited (Q 31).

Because of this limited contact between teachers and parents, important information, that might affect pupils' learning, seems to be missing and the relationship between parents and the school is based on negative messages (Table 5.19)

Table 5.19 Parents are contacted as soon as Problems arise (n=52)

Designation	N =	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	10	20	80			100
Class Teachers	18	58	26	5	11	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	53	31	8	8	100
Subject Teachers	8	63	25	12		100
Special Teachers	4	25	50		25	100
Total in %		48	39	6	7	

As many as 48% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed (39%) that as soon as problems arise parents are contacted (Q 34) (Table 5.19).

There is a general agreement between teachers on this issue (Sig. Gamma 0.111).

In spite of the fact that many teachers claimed they do not seek much information from parents, two third of respondents said they strongly agreed or agreed (67%) that organised co-operation should be in place between the school and the home (Q 32). However, this is not the reality. A statistically significant difference did not emerge on this matter between teachers' designations (Sig. Gamma = 0.652).

There seems to be an information barrier between teachers and parents in small schools. Parents do not obtain information about their their child's/children's general conditions (Q 33), and many teachers do not contact parents to seek information from them about their children (Q31). When everything is going well, teachers do not find it necessary to

inform parents or to seek parents' knowledge about their children. These results contradict one of the basic predictions about the small schools, the closeness of their communities.

In spite of the few respondents claiming they use information from parents in their teaching (Q 36), some of the respondents showed an understanding of the importance of using such information for the benefit of the child's progress and well being (Q 37, n = 24). This is explained by an example from a class teacher:

*Of course, I carefully consider parents' views and knowledge, both concerning the child's behaviour and learning. Satisfied pupils and parents make the teaching more effective and more pleasant (Q 37).*

However there were also inappropriate responses:

*If a child, for example, has an eye-problem, I can lift the book nearer to its face (Q 37).*

In this study, answers of this nature appeared several times, implying problems among teachers, such as being fatigued, even bad tempered or having an unfortunate attitude towards pupils with special needs.

#### 5.4.5 Relationship with Colleagues

When questioned about collaboration with colleagues (Q 24), it emerged that regular collaboration is not a routine practice in many of the schools.

Table 5.20 Organised Co-operation between Teachers in Small Schools (n=53)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	11	9	46	36	9		100
Class Teachers	18		42	37	16	5	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	15	54	8	23		100
Subject Teachers	8	13	50	12	25		100
Special Teachers	8		75	25			100
Total in %		7	49	26	16	2	100

Only 7% of the teachers claimed that organised collaboration between teachers always occur in the schools but 47% of them said this often

happens (Table 5.20). A statistically significant difference between different teachers did not emerge on this matter (Sig. Gamma = 0.765). These results do not support the idea that teachers believe in small schools as a way to ensure organised co-operation between teachers because the staff is small. Organised co-operation on a regular basis seems not to be a common practice in almost half of the schools

In an open question, only few teachers (67%) described how the co-operation between teachers is organised in their school (Q 25) (Table 5.21).

Table 5.21 The Organisation of Co-operation between Teachers in Small Schools (n=37)

Issues	Number of Responses	%
Co-operation on regular basis	21	38
Teachers are together all day and do not need formal meetings	16	29
Total	37	67

In all, only 38% of the teachers who responded to the question maintained that co-operation on a regular basis occurs in the school and 29% said that such co-operation was not needed as the teachers are together all day (Table 5.21). The form and the structure of the collaboration described by the respondents include planning, organisation of meetings, discussions about individual pupils, review of the curriculum and evaluation. Collaboration with other professionals also takes place such as with psychologists, special educational advisers and nurses.

It seems to be a common feature that teachers discuss problems as they arise rather than at formal meetings. As many as 29% of the respondents said this is how they collaborate in their schools (Q 25, n=16). In an open question, a teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience declared his view on teachers' collaboration:

*Because of how few we are, we do not need formal meetings, all breaks can be said to be meetings. Issues are discussed as they arise (Q 25).*

In spite of the lack of structured collaboration in small schools, many teachers claimed that in collaborative work, the attention is directed to pupils' individual needs, with 75% of respondents rating this feature highly. They maintained that attention is always or often directed to pupils' individual needs (Q 26) (Table 5.22).

Table 5.22 In Teachers' Collaboration, Attention is on Pupils' individual Needs (n=52)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Sometimes %	Seldom %	Total
Head Teachers	11	18	73	9		100
Class Teachers	17	6	59	29	6	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	31	46	23		100
Subject Teachers	8	13	62	25		100
Special Teachers	4	50	25	25		100
Total in %		19	57	22	2	100

In Table 5.22 it appears that there is some difference between designations on how strongly they think the attention is directed to pupils' individual needs. Most of the respondents said, that in teachers' co-operation, the attention on pupils' individual needs is always or often the case. This was reported by 91% of the head teachers, 75% of the special teachers and subject teachers, and 77% of the unqualified teachers. However a significant group of class teachers was neutral (29%) and 9% of them thought this was seldom the case. Nevertheless, teachers' different responses to the question are not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.662). The results (Table 5.22) give clear support to the proposal that teachers in small schools have the opportunity to give attention to pupils' individual needs in their co-operation.

It is worth noting that 61% of male respondents find their colleagues supportive, compared with only 35% of female respondents (Q 28).

However, it emerged that many of the respondents claimed they were often professionally isolated (Q 29) (Table 5.23).

Table 5.23 Teachers' Professional Isolation (n=53)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	11		55		27	18	100
Class Teachers	18	31	16	32	5	16	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	8	25	17	17	33	100
Subject Teachers	8	63	25	12			100
Special Teachers	4	25	25	50			100
Total in %		24	28	20	11	17	100

As appears in Table 5.23, as many as, 24% of the respondents said they always felt professionally isolated and 28% often felt professionally isolated. These feelings differed according to designations. Head teachers were split in their views, with 55% saying they often felt professionally isolated while 45% of them claimed they seldom or never felt isolated. It is worth highlighting that 50% of unqualified teachers said they seldom or never felt professionally isolated. They seem to obtain support from the qualified teachers. Again, class-teachers were set apart from other respondents, in their responses, as 31% of them said they were always professionally isolated and 16% said professional isolation often occurred. However, this different response between designations is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.206). Professional isolation seems to be common and seems not to depend on gender. This emerged although it has been revealed that female teacher obtain less support from colleagues than male teachers (Q 29).

#### 5.4.6 Meeting Pupils' Individual Needs in Small Schools

As is shown in Table 5.11 (Q 11) one of the characteristics of small schools, although only identified by 43% of the respondents, was that individual pupils obtain more attention, because of how few they are in the classes. This was illustrated in many of the respondents' answers:

*In small schools the atmosphere is more humane and it is possible to take care of each individual (Q 11).*

The majority of the respondents (85%) claimed they know pupils' individual needs. Only very few (15%) said they are not sure, or that they do not know the pupils needs (Q 18). All the special teachers (100%), most class-teachers (88%) and all the head teachers (100%) said they strongly agreed or agreed that learning difficulties are caused because there is not coherence between children's abilities and the demands made by the school (Q 111). These results contradict other results, which seemed to show teachers' lack of understanding of pupils with special needs.

The respondents were asked if their teaching approaches were chosen according to individual education programmes for children with special needs (Q 64) (Table 5.24)

Table 5.24 Teaching Methods chosen according to individual Programme of Children with Special Needs (n=45)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	9	33	56		11		100
Class Teachers	16	19	56	13	6	6	100
Unqualified Teachers	9	45	22	22	11		100
Subject Teachers	7	14	57	15		14	100
Special Teachers	4	50	50				100
Total in %		29	49	11	6	5	100

In Table 5.24 it appears that as most of the respondents said their teaching methods always (29%) or often (49%) are chosen according to the individual programme of children with special needs (Q 64). This indicates that most (78%) of the teachers in the sample seemed to be informed about programme for children with special needs and also indicates that they try to adapt their teaching to the existing programme for these pupils. The answers to this question are inconsistent to other responses about children with special needs, where teachers are not informed about pupils' special needs. Although some difference appeared to the above question (Q 64), this difference is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.290). These results give clear idea that most

teachers in small schools are informed about pupils' special needs and believe that they adapt their teaching approaches to these needs.

Most respondents claimed that in their collaboration with other teachers, the attention is directed at pupils' individual needs (Q 26). As many as 76% of all respondents answered this question by saying that attention is always or often, directed at pupils' individual needs. However, there was not a general agreement on this point with subject teachers and head teachers (63%) maintaining that it is possible to meet pupils' individual needs because the school is small, in contrast to only 32% of class-teachers agreeing that this was the case. Teachers (48%) in schools with less than 60 pupils were more likely to say that small schools are better able to meet pupils' individual needs compared with teachers in schools with more than 61 pupils (26%) (Q 14).

However, the respondents seemed to be uncertain as to whether they achieve the objectives of the schools' curriculum (Q 16, n = 54). This seems to indicate that the link between teaching and the objectives of the curriculum is missing in some cases and raises questions about teachers' participation in the design of the curriculum.

The respondents were asked if pupils' special needs were considered in the school curriculum (Q 40, n = 41), and if so, how (Q 40, open-ended, n = 25). Only 15% of all the respondents who answered the first of the above questions said this was always the case, but a difference emerged according to teachers' designation (Q 40) (Table 5.25).



Table 5.25 Children's Special Needs considered in the School Curriculum (n=41)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	8	13	63	12		12	100
Class Teachers	12	17	33	34	8	8	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	17	50	16		17	100
Subject Teachers	6	17	17	33	17	17	100
Special Teachers	3		67		33		100
Total in %		15	44	22	7	12	100

In Table 5.25 it appears that 17% of the unqualified teachers and 17% of the subject teachers said that pupils' special needs were always considered in the school curriculum and 34% of the subject teachers said this was seldom or never done. Class teachers responses were in the same line; 17% of them thought pupils' special needs were always considered in the curriculum, 33% said this was often true and 16% said this was seldom or never the case. Head teachers' responses certainly contrasted with these answers, as 76% of them said that pupils' special needs were always (13%) or often (63%) considered in the school curriculum. However, teachers' different responses are not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.509). The teachers' answers, with the exception of the head teachers' answers, seem to indicate that pupils' special needs are seldom considered in the schools' curriculum. The results do not support the idea that pupils' special needs are considered in the school curriculum in small schools. If it occurs it might be carried out by head teachers only. The reason for this may be that a school curriculum does not exist in many schools. This claim is supported by the respondents' answers to other questions (Q 38, Q 39, Q 42, Q43, Q 44)

The answers to the follow-up question (Q 40), where the respondents had the opportunity to explain how special needs are considered in the schools' curriculum, seem to point towards this same indication. The answers to the question were few (n = 25) and inconsistent and special educational aspects were only apparent in the answers of a few

respondents (n = 11). These eleven respondents all gave a description of an approach to meeting special needs. They all added to their answers, that children with special needs in the schools receive an individual educational programme. The following example is descriptive:

*We aim at meeting special needs by organised pair-teaching, special education, applying individual programmes and by adapting the timetable special educational needs in the school (Q 39).*

The above results seem to indicate that special needs are seldom considered in the small school curriculum or a school curriculum does not exist. The very few (20%) teachers who said that special needs are considered in the school curriculum seem to be aware of pupils' special needs and individual programmes are designed in order to meet their needs. However, as many as 80% of respondents did not answer the question about how special needs are considered in the school curriculum (Q 40). The following answers illustrate common responses from the few respondents who answered this question:

*The curriculum is general and aimed at the group as a whole and adapted to the conditions in the school. Special needs are rather considered in each individual programme (Q 40).*

*Because of the small number of pupils, the school curriculum turns out to be designed for each individual rather than being one plan for all (Q 40).*

The above responses indicate that some schools have not implemented a policy for pupils with special needs or even that there are some problems related to the design of curriculum for the whole school. The responses to most questions about provision about special education, the curriculum and teaching approaches seem to indicate some kind of helplessness or lack of knowledge in the field of special education and curriculum design.

### 5.4.7 The School Curriculum

Questions about the curriculum were aimed at obtaining information about the design and implementation of the schools' curriculum as well as at gaining understanding of teachers' ways of thinking about the curriculum.

The response rate to all questions about the schools' curriculum was very low. There is a disagreement on whose responsibility it is to design the school curriculum (Q38) (Table 5.26).

Table 5.26 School Curriculum designed in Collaboration (n=50)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	10	30	10	20	20	20	100
Class Teachers	18	11	11	28		28	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	25	33	8	8	25	100
Subject Teachers	6	17		17	17	50	100
Special Teachers	4		25	75	22		100
Total in %		18	16	24	16	26	100

As shown in Table 5.26, it emerged that the head teachers said the school curriculum was always (30%) or often (10%) designed in collaboration with teachers (Q 38). This contrasts with other respondents' answers. Only 22% of class-teachers said they always or often collaborated in this process and 57% of them claimed they seldom or never participated in curriculum development. However, the different response according to designation is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.554).

These results are in accordance with the results about special education provision in the schools. Both seem to indicate that head teachers estimate the situation more positively than other respondents and a high percentage of class teachers do not participate in the design of the school's curriculum. Although head teachers think the curriculum is designed collaboratively, other respondents' seem to have a different opinion, claiming that special needs are not considered in the curriculum.

Other results also show that teachers seem not to be involved in the curriculum design. Thirty-three (60%) respondents described how the work on the school curriculum is carried out (Q 39). Most of them (42%) said that the general part of the curriculum is designed in collaboration, and then it is each teacher's responsibility to construct the curriculum for her/his own class. In some schools the design of the curriculum seemed to be very open. In the words of a class teacher:

*In this school we think it is right to adjust teaching to each individual on a weekly basis (Q 39).*

This is in accordance with the response to the question where the respondents were asked; if their teaching approach depends upon the objectives they set for each class (Q 65). Many teachers (always 27%, often 66%) seemed to approach the teaching according to objectives set for the group at a time. Accordingly, teachers seem to plan their teaching individually with their own class in mind, rather than creating a holistic plan for the school (Q91).

Professional working habits like monitoring the curriculum on a regular basis did not seem to be common within the schools (Q 42, n = 41). While special teachers (100%) agreed that they systematically monitor curriculum objectives, only 39% of class-teachers strongly agreed (8%) or agreed (31%) they do so. Head teachers' views were similar to those of class-teachers (38% agreed). Then again, this difference is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.091). Only 53% of the respondents explained how they monitor the objectives of the curriculum (Q 43). Some (11%) answers were not appropriate and may indicate professional problems:

*...once in a while we take the curriculum from the shelves and we have a look at it (Q 43).*

Other respondents were more specific:

*By regular evaluation and testing. There are also many other aspects we evaluate, such as behaviour. Pupils are involved in the discussion about the evaluation (Q 43).*

A consistency could be expected between the objectives of the school curriculum and teaching approaches (Q 44, n = 40). When asked about this issue 55% of the respondents agreed that this was the case. Here, there is some inconsistency in the above answers where it may be understood that a school's curriculum is missing. However, special teachers were more definite in their responses, as all of them (100%) agreed that there was a consistency between the schools curriculum and teaching approaches. It has emerged before in this study that most respondents do not seem to participate in the construction of school curriculum. Therefore it is not surprising that 28% of the respondents were uncertain about whether there was a consistency between these two issues, with 60% of the subject teachers saying that they are not sure (40%) or disagreed (20%). Again, the responses indicate some problems relating to the design of a school curriculum.

The respondents were asked if they believe it is the class teacher who is responsible for meeting all children's needs (Q 113) (Table 5.27).

Table 5.27 Class Teachers are responsible for meeting Children's individual Needs (n=42)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Strongly disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	9	44	45	11		100
Class Teachers	14	21	29	43	7	100
Unqualified Teachers	10	50	20	30		100
Subject Teachers	5	40	40	20		100
Special Teachers	4	75		25		100
Total in %		40	29	29	2	100

Although half (50%) of the class-teachers strongly believe it is their responsibility to meet all children's individual needs, many of them were ambivalent (sometimes 43%) in this case (Q 113, n = 42) (Table 5.27). However, head teachers either strongly agreed (44%) or agreed (45%). Subject teachers, special teachers and unqualified teachers responses were similar to those of head teachers; with most of them believing that class-teachers are responsible to meet all children's individual needs

(Table 5.27). The difference that emerged between designations is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.710). The results strongly support the idea that class teachers are responsible to meet all pupils' individual needs.

In this study there are several other instances where it emerges that teachers in small schools are inclined to meet pupils on an individual basis. The respondents (43%) said that one of the main characteristics of small schools is that pupils receive more attention (Q 11), and 76% of respondents claimed, that in their collaborative work, the attention is directed to pupils' individual needs (Q 26). However, this aspect is not given much consideration by teachers in respect to the school curriculum, excepting head teachers' (Q 40).

The responses to the questions about the school curriculum seem to indicate that the preparation and planning of a school curriculum in many schools is not worked out collaboratively. The overall uncertainty that emerges in answers to questions about curriculum, and the low response to all the questions about this issue seems to indicate that, small school teachers do not feel empowered to engage with curriculum planning.

#### 5.4.8 Teaching Approaches, Preparation and Teaching Arrangements

The teachers were asked a range of questions about their teaching approaches, preparation and teaching arrangements. They were also asked several questions about multi-grade grouping, a feature that distinguishes small schools from larger schools. It was thought that the multi-grade classes would possibly affect the way in which teachers approached their teaching.

It is striking that the most common practice in the classroom is having pupils work individually. In an answer to an open question, as many as 51% of respondents stated this directly (Q 56). Furthermore, nearly all

teachers maintained that pupils' tasks were set according to their needs (Q 45) (Table 5.28).

Table 5.28 Pupils Tasks are set according to their Needs (n=53)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	11	18	82			100
Class Teachers	18	53	47			100
Unqualified Teachers	12	61	39			100
Subject Teachers	8	37	37	13	13	100
Special Teachers	4	75	25			
Total in %		47	49	2	2	100

In Table 5.28 it appears that on the whole most respondents strongly agreed (47%); or agreed (49%) that pupils tasks were set according to their needs (Sig. Gamma 0.600). Of those who answered the question (Q 45) more women strongly agreed (58%), than men (33%).

The results showed that individualistic teaching is common in small schools (Q 57) (Table 5.29).

Table 5.29 New Topics/Issues are taught individually (n=53)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	11	9	64	18	9		100
Class Teachers	18		28	39	28	5	100
Unqualified Teachers	12		67	33			100
Subject Teachers	8		37	38	25		100
Special Teachers	4	25	25	25	25		100
Total in %		4	45	32	17	2	100

Many teachers claimed that when teaching new topics/issues, their teaching was often (45%) based on teaching each pupil individually (individualistic teaching) (Q 57) (Table 5.29). This is illustrated by one teacher's answer:

*My teaching is based on teaching individuals. Tasks are suited to individual needs and pupils work independently. Sometimes new items are taught in the whole group (Q 56).*

Most teachers seemed to apply individualistic teaching when teaching new topics/issues, but class teachers indicated that it was not often applied (sometimes, 39%, seldom, 28%). In spite of this difference found between designations, the difference was not statistically significant (Sig. Gamma = 0.475). This practice is verified in other responses. Most teachers said that pupils work on their own for the larger part of the school day. Pupils' work on tasks does not seem to be linked to those of others in the class, as the respondents claimed that, 80% of pupils' work is carried out individually (Q 70, n = 54). Teachers do not seem to organise their classes in a way that encourages co-operation. Teachers said that pupils only occasionally work in pairs (73%), or in groups (58%). Only 18% of respondents said that group work is often arranged in the classroom.

Most teachers (89%) maintained that they intentionally teach pupils to work systematically (Q 46, n = 38) and similarly 83% of the respondents who answered the question, said they teach pupils to work individually (Q 48, n = 53). It is a common practice to have pupils work individually and the teachers indicated that they teach pupils to work independently (Table 5.30)

Table 5.30 Teachers intentionally teach Pupils to work independently (n=53)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	11	27	46	9	18	100
Class Teachers	18	39	44	17		100
Unqualified Teachers	12	46	46	8		100
Subject Teachers	8	63	25	12		100
Special Teachers	4	25	50		25	100
Total in %		41	42	11	6	100

As is shown in Table 5.30, teachers strongly agreed (41%) or agreed (43%) that they intentionally teach pupils to work individually (Q 48).



However, there was some difference in this regard among teachers of different designation; 18% of head teachers and 25 % of special teachers disagreed that this was true (Sig.Gamma 0.053). The results were close to the 0.05 level of statistical significance. These results clearly support the proposal that teachers believe small schools provide an opportunity for them to attend to pupils on an individual basis.

As it has appeared that multi-grade grouping is one of the characteristics of small schools, and much practised, it could be expected that teachers intentionally taught pupils co-operation skills (Q 50) (Table 5.31).

Table 5.31 Teachers intentionally teach Pupils to co-operate (n=52)

Designation	N=	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Total
Head Teachers	11		46	36	9	9	100
Class Teachers	17	29	35	24	12		100
Unqualified Teachers	12	23	54	8	15		100
Subject Teachers	8	37	38	25			100
Special Teachers	4		100				100
Total in %		21	47	21	9	2	100

In all, only 21% of all the respondents said they strongly agreed that they systematically taught pupils to co-operate (Q 50), but 47% said they agreed this was true (Table, 5.31). Teachers' responses to this issue differed according to designation; all the special teachers (100%) agreed that they teach collaboration skills while only just over half of the class teachers (strongly agreed, 29%; agreed 35%) said they teach pupils' to work collaboratively. The difference is statistically significant (Sig.Gamma = 0.031). Therefore, it is possible to claim that while some teachers teach pupils to co-operate, other teachers do not empathise this aspect of teaching to the same degree.

Teachers were asked if certain teaching approaches were more appropriate than others in small schools. Only a few respondents strongly agreed (31%) that this was the case and only 25% agreed (Q 54). In an open question that succeeded this one, teachers were asked

what teaching approaches they thought were especially appropriate in small schools (Q 55, n = 33). It is striking how few teachers responded to the question and some answers were unexpected:

*I don't know, I have only been teaching for 30 years in a number of different schools. Still I have much to learn, and I am always trying to find the right method (Q 55).*

Other teachers were more direct in their responses and 45% of the respondents said that individualistic teaching is the most appropriate approach in the classroom:

*Individualistic teaching is inevitably most appropriate, because most pupils in the class are provided with different tasks. Small groups are very well applicable too, but differentiation is necessary here as in other schools (Q 55).*

Pupils work on their own and receive individualistic teaching. In spite of the very small number pupils in class, co-operation is rare. Pupils are not working together to accomplish shared goals and practising their social skills. The teachers might find multi-grade teaching demanding or difficult and therefore they put individualistic teaching into practice, although other approaches might be more appropriate in the small classes. This may also indicate that, because of lack of knowledge about other possibilities, individualistic teaching is their only choice.

In this study, the content of teaching material seems to have little effect on the choice of teaching methods. Only 30% of the respondents said that available teaching material often affected their choice of approach, and 37% claimed that this happens occasionally (Q 61). Similarly teachers said the teaching material often influenced their teaching approach (Q 60) (Table 5.32).

Table 5.32 Teaching Material has Effect on Teaching (n=53)

Designation	N=	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Never %	Total
Head Teachers	11	46	36	18		100
Class Teachers	18	21	37	37	5	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	15	62	23		100
Subject Teachers	8	37	25	37		100
Special Teachers	4	50	50			100
Total in %		29	42	27	2	100

As shown in Table 5.32, few teachers (29%) said that teaching material is often influential when they choose teaching approaches, but 42% said that this is occasionally the case (Q 60). The difference between designations is not statistically significant (Sig.Gamma 0.304). To take this analysis further, 42% of class-teachers and 50% of subject teachers maintained that the teaching material seldom determined their choice of teaching method (Q 61).

Many respondents (63%) said their teaching methods are in accordance with the objectives of the curriculum, and 20% said this is so, only occasionally. This could indicate that the teachers are familiar with the content of the curriculum even though they do not participate in its design (Q 38).

Teachers claimed that multi-grade grouping is one of the main characteristics of the small school (Q 11). When asked about the major arrangement in the classrooms it emerged that multi-grade grouping is the main arrangement in the classroom (Q 66).

Table 5.33 Teaching Arrangements in the Classroom

Size of school	One age group	Multi-grade classes
5-20	1	6
21-40		7
41-60	1	17
61-80		14
81-100		9
Total:	2	53
%	4	96

In Table 5.33 it appears that there are multi-grade classes in most of the small schools (96%) and only 4% of the respondent only teach a class of one age. It emerged that many teachers (47%) also have the opportunity to teach children of one age together although multi-grade classes is the dominating arrangement. Surprisingly, it emerged that in a school of less than 20 pupils the teacher teaches a class with children of one age.

It has emerged that many of the respondents claimed they are often (55%) professionally isolated (Q 29). Still they do not seem to initiate or engage in professional exchange with their colleagues to avoid isolation (Q 92-94). The most common practice in most of the schools is that teachers teach alone (Q 67). As many as 95% of respondents, always or often teach alone.

It appeared that teachers always or most often (84%) decide what tasks the pupils keep to. The subject teachers most often make the decisions themselves about pupils' tasks (often, 88%), compared with all other respondents (often, 58%) (Q 75). However, some teachers seem to allow for pupils' decisions. Surprisingly, 50% of the special teachers said they allow pupils to decide their tasks themselves. This is remarkable, as it has been revealed that some pupils with special needs are provided with special educational programmes.

Even though the respondents have said that they respond to special needs (78%, Q 64), in other questions (Q 76) they revealed that pupils of the

same age are often (46%) provided with the same task, at the same time (Table 5.34)

Table 5.34 All Pupils of same Age carry out the same Tasks at the same Time (n=53)

Designation	N=	Always %	Often %	Some-times %	Seldom %	Total
Head Teachers	11		36	27	36	100
Class Teachers	18		42	37	21	100
Unqualified Teachers	12	15	54	31		100
Subject Teachers	8		37	50	13	100
Special Teachers	4		75	25		100
Total in %		4	45	35	16	100

All teachers (45%), including special teachers indicated that all pupils of same age often carried out the same tasks at the same time (Table 5.34). Little difference in this regard appeared between designations (Sig.Gamma = 0.209). The results do not support the proposal that teachers in small schools believe that in small school it is possible to apply differentiated teaching because of the small number of pupils. The reason for this may be teachers' lack of skills or training in such methods to teaching.

In addition individualistic teaching is most common in most of the schools (Q 70; Q56). This again supports the indication, that differentiation is not a common practice in the small schools. Consequently, co-operation is not the common practice in small schools. However, it is common to have pupils sitting together in groups (42%) working on their tasks, seemingly on their own. In other classes pupils sometimes sit on their own or in groups or in pairs (51%) (Table 5.35).

Table 5.35 Seating Arrangement in the Classroom

Issues	Number responses	%
Each child sits alone	4	7
The children sit only in groups	23	42
The children sit by themselves in groups or in pairs	28	51
Total	55	100

Individualistic teaching is the prominent teaching method in small schools and pupils' work is characterised by individual seatwork. The low number of pupils in the class does not seem to make it easier for the teachers to apply teaching methods that might be more suitable in multi-grade classes. This may indicate that teachers divide their time in one-to-one interaction, which does not necessarily mean that individual needs are met.

When asked to make open-ended comments about multi-grade groups teachers tended to be positive (Q 82, n = 21). The following answers illustrate teachers' views:

*Very much, but it is demanding and needs a lot of preparation. It is very good for the pupils to be not only with children of the same age, it has a good effect on their development (Q 82).*

*I am very pleased, although I think the ability gap is not more than in a class of 28 in a large school. The younger pupils learn a lot from the older ones and try hard to do well. I do not see any disadvantages (Q 82).*

*I do not like the arrangement; there are few advantages. If any, it is that the younger children learn from the older ones. This demands much more organising; the teacher is teaching one hour but has to prepare 2-3 hours because of the multi-grade class (Q 82).*

*I mainly see advantages with the arrangement. The teacher has to aim at meeting individual needs. Pupils become self-confident, and they do not compare themselves with the other children in the class. They understand everyone is special. Of course this demands much more work on the part of the teacher, more preparation for the lessons, the teacher has to work with children*

*of different ages all the time and with different curriculum. This means that a great deal of organisation is necessary not only with regard to the teaching, but to the whole arrangement (Q 82).*

Even though few teachers answered the question they seemed to see the advantages of this arrangement. Nevertheless, overall teachers in small schools do not seem to make use of the advantages of multi-grade teaching and its possibilities within the schools.

## **5.5 Discussion**

According to Cohen and Manion (1985) the intention behind surveys is to describe the nature of an existing condition, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared. They are essentially fact-finding and descriptive although the data collected may be used to make predictions. The aim of this study was to describe the characteristics of the situation of small schools in Iceland. The evidence offered insight into teachers' practice and views on educational and pedagogical features of small schools and included the following variables: characteristics of small schools; teacher-pupils relationships; relationships with parents; relationships with colleagues; individual needs; the school curriculum; teaching approaches; preparation and teaching arrangement; material and conditions; school development and external support.

The theory of this study made four predictions: a) the low number of pupils in small schools creates opportunities to develop close teacher-pupil relationships and enables teachers to consider pupils' individual needs, b) small schools can provide opportunities for fruitful co-operation among staff and therefore opportunities to establish clear aims for the school, c) the existence of multi-grade classes in small schools calls for teaching approaches especially suited for such classes, d) small communities can facilitate relationships with parents and therefore detailed knowledge about pupils from parents that can enrich the curriculum.

Despite the extensive questionnaire sent to these small schools and although the study had good rates of return, the expected high valuation of small schools, did not materialize. In relationships, attention to pupils with special needs, teaching in multi-grade classes, developing the curriculum, working with parents and co-operation, teachers' responses did not indicate that small schools offer an ideal environment. There may be many reasons for this; staff may be poorly trained, isolated, predominately part time and therefore not committed to their work, poorly resourceful in terms of curriculum facilities and most significantly unprepared to exploit the potential advantages of small schools.

The results reported in the study give rise to several considerations. It was expected that unqualified teachers would reflect different views from qualified teachers, but there was no significant difference with regard to this. The respondents claimed that they appreciate the advantages of the small school, but there are several indicators that these advantages are not brought to bear in the work of the schools. The teachers do not seem to be united around an ideology necessary for a holistic learning plan for meeting the needs of all pupils in their schools, as an overall uncertainty emerged about the school curriculum in general. Although, many respondents said they do know pupils' individual needs, they seem not to pay enough attention to individual differences or understand the way in which the characteristics of small schools can have positive benefits for pupils' development. There emerged a low response rate to all questions about how teachers account for pupils' special needs, to questions about the school curriculum, and questions about suitable teaching approaches for multi-grade teaching. The respondents do not seem to view the small number of children in classes as a challenge. The low response rate to all the questions about the school curriculum might indicate that the teachers are not involved in planning the curriculum. The opportunity to adapt teaching approaches that are suited to the needs of all children is rejected as will be discussed later in this section. Pupils' social interaction seems not to be facilitated, teaching approaches are single-tracked and teachers' attitude towards multi-grade teaching seems to create a problem. Pupils'



own will and motivation seems to be given little consideration. The respondents claimed that they assign tasks to suit their pupils' abilities. However, some of the teachers said it was difficult to meet the needs of individual pupils. Additionally, there seems to be a common experience of professional isolation. It appears that formal collaboration is not a common practice, and the reality seems to be that a distance is maintained between colleagues as well as between teachers and parents. However, teachers do not seek professional support through the means of formal collaboration with teachers in their school or in *other schools*. Parents are mainly contacted when things go wrong and teachers do not seek information from parents concerning their children's learning.

The advantages of the small schools, the smallness and close human relationships do not seem to be utilised in the small schools in the sample. It emerged that nearly one third of the class teachers maintained that the smallness does not make it easier to meet pupils' special needs. This was unexpected, as at first sight it seems obvious that it is easier to know pupils and to meet their needs when they are few in the class. Only very few responses (20%) allowed for an analysis of how pupils' special needs are taken into account of in the school curriculum.

This low response rate might indicate that the schools have not implemented a school curriculum and lack special educational policy. A lack of special educational policy might indicate that head teachers and teachers have not acquired the necessary knowledge, attitude and skills in special education. Therefore, teachers might also lack the capacity to undertake special education in the classroom. Milofsky (1992) found that teachers without qualification in special education do not have the necessary understanding of pupils' special needs and they are not able to analyse their difficulties. In Icelandic graduate programmes for teacher training there has been none or insignificant emphasis on special education. It is only in recent years that such programmes have been on offer. Therefore it is likely that most class teachers are not prepared to meet the needs of pupils with different disabilities. These teachers need

support and supervision from a specialist in the field. Such support will not however, ensure that these teachers grasp the necessary ideology and understanding needed for meeting the needs of pupils with different disabilities. Although they have acquired support they might not immediately be able to transfer specific knowledge and skills without relevant experience (Norwich, 1990). There seems to be a definite need for further training in special education for teachers in Iceland.

There were only a few special teachers in the small schools in the sample. Therefore, it was expected that teachers would seek advice and support from support services. The results showed that this is in fact the practice. Most of the respondents (85%) said they obtained support from the support service in the area. Teachers with less teaching experience seemed to make less use of the service compared with teachers who had taught more than 10 years (always 35% against, 65%). The reason for this might be that teachers with less experience might not understand the importance of seeking support or do not know the role of the support services. The problem is made worse by the fact that the teaching experience of these teachers is less and they might be in more need of support.

It was expected that small schools offer opportunities to develop a strong school ethos and opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to learn from each other. The results that emerged from the class teachers contradict this belief. Nearly one third of them said that small schools do not facilitate relationships between pupils. This was considerable fewer than the other respondents (86%) who claimed that small schools promote close relationships between pupils. These results relate to other findings of the study, which show that pupils' social and emotional development seems to be neglected to some extent, both because relationships are not initiated and teaching approaches suitable for multi-grade teaching are not applied. Instead, the teaching is characterised by extensive individualistic teaching and thereby the advantages of small schools are not utilised.

It was expected that the multi-grade classes would affect the way in which teachers approached their teaching. It has been stated that certain teaching approaches are especially suitable in multi-grade classes (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Miller, 1989 and 1994), and Malmros and Norlén (1984) claim that multi-grade classes provide teachers with the possibilities of applying challenging and high-quality teaching approaches. Other researchers have shown that co-operative learning approaches provide opportunities to meet pupils' individual needs and to develop social skills and increases the possibilities to meet pupils' special needs (Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Slavin et al. 1985). Slavin et al. (1985) and Johnson and Johnson (1994) argue that such methods create different tasks and reward structures and, consequently, different amounts and kinds of interdependence and social facilitation among the students. Reciprocal teaching is another approach that is suitable for multi-grade classes. It is designed to encourage pupils' reciprocal support and to expand their comprehension (Brown, 1985).

Veenman (1995) maintains that instructional practices in multi-grade classes are poorly understood, but studies available confirm that the most popular method is to teach a lesson to one grade while other grades work on follow-up activities to previous instruction (individual seatwork). This is in direct agreement to the findings of this study. The most common practice in the classroom was individualistic teaching (51%) and the pupils work on their own for the greater part of the school day (80%). According to Ainscow and Muncey (1987), by individualistic teaching, the pupils seek achievement and complete tasks that are unrelated to those of others; and seek outcomes that are personally beneficial and ignore as irrelevant the achievements of their classmates (Ainscow and Muncey, 1987:102). The emphasis on individualistic teaching may adversely influence pupils' development and progress, not least their social and emotional development. The pupils are not working together to accomplish shared goals and tasks; they are not encouraged to be more skillful in learning co-operatively.

Research on co-operative learning has revealed the positive effect on academic outcomes, self-esteem, social skills and social relationships, and personal development generally. It has also been shown that co-operative learning approaches provide opportunities to meet pupils' individual needs (Johnson and Johnson, 1994, Slavin, et al. 1985). The results showed that group work is not a common practice (18%). However, pupils often sit in groups (73%) and the teachers said that they teach pupils to co-operate. These results contradict with other answers as the pupils basically work on their own. This may indicate that pupils are often placed in groups but work individually. This arrangement has been found in schools in other countries. What often looks like group work because pupils sit in groups is in reality individualistic work (Bennett, 1994; Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Putnam, 1993; Veenman, 1995).

The results confirm the belief that teachers' attitude remains a problem with regard to multi-grade teaching. Only just under one third of the respondents strongly agreed that in multi-grade classes certain teaching approaches are more appropriate than others and only one fourth agreed this was the case. In an open question the respondents got the opportunity to express what teaching approaches they thought were especially appropriate in small schools. Again, only one third of the respondents chose to respond to this question. The reason for this low response rate may be found in the findings of Sigurgeirsson (1999) who showed that classroom instruction in Iceland is dominated by "passive individual seatwork and various forms of textbook teaching" (Sigurgeirsson, 1999:5). The findings of Reid et al. (1982) might also explain why teachers find it difficult to give an account of appropriate teaching approaches in multi-grade classes. In their research, it was frequently identified that the attitude of teachers was obstructing the development of effective mixed-ability work. They report that a commonly reported constraint was that teachers found it difficult to break away from former habits and adapt to new roles (Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher and Vile, 1982). This is in accordance with recently

published results on classroom practice in Iceland. When pupils' needs are diverse, teachers find it demanding to take account of their needs. This also applies to pupils' social skills, working habits and activity in the class (Eggertsdóttir, 1999). If teachers do not apply teaching approaches suitable for multi-grade classes, it might have considerable consequences for pupils' social and emotional development as well as their cognitive development.

The results indicate that the prevailing teaching practice engaged in by the respondents is transmission of knowledge and pupils' learning seems to depend on teachers to a great extent. The respondents reported that pupils themselves are not involved in decisions about their learning as they seldom get the opportunity to choose their tasks themselves, although this happens occasionally. It also emerged that only one fifth of the respondents maintained they intentionally teach pupils to work together, although they said they intentionally teach pupils to organise their work. Although it has been shown that class teachers find it difficult to meet the needs of all pupils, the majority of the respondents claimed that pupils' tasks are chosen according to their needs (strongly agreed, 47%; agreed 49%). However, in the multi-grade classes, teachers teach the whole class at a time (49%), when teaching new topics. The prerequisites for learning to occur seems to be held back, as such teaching methods can't reach all pupils. Such an arrangement prevents pupils from actively constructing knowledge by relating incoming information to a previously acquired frame of reference (Bruner, 1990). Pollard and Tann (1993) explain that an arrangement, which is dominated by the teacher, leaves the pupils passive and the learning is not connected with pupils' existing knowledge and may lead to superficiality. In addition, it may be difficult to motivate all pupils in the class and to adapt the structure of subject matter to varied pupil needs (Pollard and Tann, 1993:114). The advantages of having small classes with pupils of different ages and abilities seem not to be used in the small schools.

It was expected that the class teachers might be badly prepared to teach multi-grade classes, as they have *most likely not received* special training for multi-grade teaching. Teachers' lack of knowledge and skills about suitable methods for multi-grade teaching are revealed in their one-sided use of individualistic teaching; their teaching is dominated by individualistic methods and the pupils work alone, rather than in co-operation. Such approaches prevent pupils from developing the necessary social skills and from participating in creative co-operative tasks. It is noteworthy, that teachers who have applied co-operative learning in the classroom expressed that their self confidence has increased considerably, as well as their professional satisfaction (Eggertsdóttir, 1999; Jóhannesdóttir, 1998). If such development is to take place, teachers need training in new approaches, and they need continuous professional support (Eggertsdóttir, 1999; Jóhannesdóttir, 1998). This may indicate that teachers should obtain training in multi-grade teaching and teacher-training institutions should acknowledge that multi-grade classes are a reality in many schools.

It was expected that teaching in multi-grade classes would call attention to the importance of planning opportunities designed for developing a range of skills and the underlying policy would be made apparent in the school curriculum. It was also expected that head teachers were the initiators as well as coordinators in the process of a holistic school curriculum design and that teachers participated or were informed about the content and in the design of the curriculum. The results contradict this belief. An overall uncertainty emerged from the teachers' responses about the curriculum in general, which seems to indicate that teachers in these schools are not united around an ideology necessary for a holistic learning plan for meeting the needs of all pupils in their schools. The class teachers seemed not to be familiar with the objectives of the curriculum and the link between its objectives and evaluation seems to be missing. Under one fifth of the class teachers maintained that the process and design of the school curriculum is carried out through collaboration, while 50% of the other respondents claimed this happens seldom or

never. Only just over one third of the class teachers said that the objectives of the curriculum are monitored on a regular basis. The class teachers were also ambivalent whether they were responsible for taking part in the design of the curriculum and for adapting it to individual pupils' needs. Apparently, head teachers' viewed this differently, as just under half of them strongly agreed and the other half agreed this was the case. Finally, head teachers and subject teachers (79%) agreed that it is possible to monitor individual pupils' progress because pupils are so few, against 47% the class teachers who agreed with this. The class teachers' responses on curriculum matters contradict the other respondents and it is not clear who is responsible for the design of the curriculum. Additionally, the low response rate to all the questions about the school curriculum might indicate that the teachers are not involved in planning the curriculum and that progressive leadership might be lacking

In the UK, Sigþórsson (1995) found that head teachers in England emphasise the participation of all teachers in the design of the curriculum through school developmental projects. The results from this same study showed that in Icelandic schools such procedures were not a part of heads teachers' practice (Sigþórsson, 1995), which seems to support the class teachers' view. Galton (1990) and his colleagues have carried out extensive research on small schools. He maintains that curriculum decisions about what should be taught in schools are closely bound up with educational ideologies. Many schools have made use of developmental theories, which emphasise the need for a curriculum consisting of activities determined by the child's interest, attitudes, and subjective experience. It does not place the stress on knowledge but on skills that concern the development of the whole child emotionally, physically, socially and morally. The situation revealed in the results of this study might prevent opportunities for pupils to practice a range of skills in a cross-curriculum context; managerial and professional organisation seems to be inadequate as the teachers are not coordinated around intentional curriculum design. This lack of co-operation might indicate that the respondents are not aware of the importance of a holistic

curriculum plan and how this might influence pupils learning and even the school ethos.

It was expected that the small school would seek information from parents, to build up positive links and relationships for the benefits of pupils. Children's learning and development is affected by their experiences both within and outside the school; therefore it seems important to establish relationships with parents. From the findings, it may be deduced that the information channel between teachers and parents is limited. Teachers hardly seek any information from parents and such information does not seem to be used for the benefit of pupils' learning. It is noteworthy that just under half of class teachers reported that the school had no organised co-operation with parents. However, almost all (92%) the respondents other than class teachers (47%) thought that the small community facilitates relationships with parents. The contact with parents does not seem to be focussed on certain objectives, as few respondents maintained they seek information from parents about their children, in spite of claiming they think such information is necessary. It is noteworthy that most of the respondents said they contact parents as soon as problems arise. By this, the message given to both pupils and parents is that the link between the school and the home is based on negative messages. This approach might obviously put parents in a defensive position and is not likely to build up positive links between parents and the school. The Plowden Report<sup>30</sup> firmly stated that in all educational planning and policy the virtue of the power of good relationships between a pupil's school and the home should be recognised for the benefit of pupils' learning (Plowden Report, 1967). The Icelandic National Curriculum (1999) considers education and the wellbeing of pupils as the joint task of school and the home. In this co-operation the main task is to emphasise pupils' learning and wellbeing

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<sup>30</sup> The Plowden Committee which was established in 1963 aimed at reviewing primary education in the UK and its connection with secondary education. In the Plowden Report the emphasis was on progressive education, which involved that all pupils should have the possibility to be educated (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987:40).



(National Curriculum, 1999). Obviously, it will be hard to achieve these objectives if co-operation with parents is not structured, and if parents are only contacted when problems arise.

As there is a lack of formal co-operation between the school and parents, regular collaboration between colleagues is not a routine practice in many of the schools in this study. Just over a quarter of the respondents said that it was not necessary to arrange formal meetings because teachers were already together all day. Discussing problems as they arise informally seems to be a common feature. In many schools the breaks seem to be used for these discussions. Surprisingly, formal collaboration seems to be more frequent in schools with less than 60 pupils (74%) compared with schools with more than 60 pupils (30%). This lack of formal co-operation may be an explanation why many of the respondents seem not to utilise the advantages of the small school as has already been reported. The lack of co-operation may be because of a lack of organisation within the schools and lack of support between colleagues. Studies by Rosenholtz (1991) show that teachers' effectiveness may depend on their collaboration with colleagues. Co-operation may add to teachers' sense of self-worth and facilitate necessary decisions, as well as ease problem solving. In this way, collaboration, may promote more effective learning in the classroom (Rosenholtz, 1991).

This lack of formal co-operation may help to explain the professional isolation that seems to occur within the schools. In all, just over half of the respondents said that they felt professional isolation. Again, class-teachers' views were different from those of other respondents, as just under one third of this group considered themselves always to be professionally isolated and just under one fifth of them said this often occurs. Many unqualified teachers seem to obtain support from other teachers, as 50% of them said they are seldom or never isolated. In this regard, head teachers were divided in two almost equal groups (always 55%, never 45%). In spite of this professional isolation, only 7% of the respondents maintained they have established formal co-operation with

teachers in other schools. Bell and Sigsworth (1987:143-144) argue that a variety of factors may influence professional isolation. Firstly, they point to the individualistic nature of teaching. Secondly, teachers' own self-worth and commitment may in part determine whether teachers turn inward or outward in their practice. Thirdly, the way the school is organised will be influential, as will the way the head teacher defines his or her role and how professional expertise is used. The size of the school seems not to be a crucial factor. This may indicate that the lack of intentional collaboration and professional working habits in small schools may be the cause of the professional isolation that has emerged in this study.

### 5.5.1 Conclusion

On the whole, the results of this study indicate that some flaws seem to occur in the schools in the sample, which might have considerable consequences that affect pupils. The results indicate that the predicted advantages of the small schools are not utilised.

The lack of attention to pupils' special needs may have considerable consequences; it may prevent pupils' individual needs from being met, and actively encourage their social, emotional and cognitive development. The belief that smallness does not make it easier to meet pupils' special needs might indicate a lack of knowledge and insight in special education and therefore the need for further training in special education for teachers.

The lack of co-operation and intentional organisation of the curriculum may prevent teachers' holistic view of curriculum matters and a school policy is likely to be missing. This may materialise in various ways. Most significantly, provisions to actively meet pupils needs might be lacking; such as holistic programmes and suitable teaching approaches.

The lack of teaching approaches appropriate for multi-grade teaching may prevent teachers' professional fulfilment, but most significantly, it is likely to affect pupils in various ways. It may prevent their opportunities to be engaged in numerous tasks, to develop effective study skills, to learn from each other, and generally it may influence their personal development and progress.

The lack of contact and co-operation with parents in small schools may stop schools from drawing upon the expertise within a community as well as not obtaining detailed knowledge and information about pupils from parents. Therefore an important key to a holistic curriculum is missing.

In recent years, the notion that all teachers are teachers of pupils with learning difficulties has been put forward. The idea behind this affirmation has been to encourage all teachers' to take on the responsibility for the special educational needs of all pupils. This responsibility is confirmed in the Icelandic Educational Act (1995) as well as this is internationally stated. Therefore, educational policy now demands that all teachers must be able to teach pupils with special needs. Such a policy may be applied in many cases (Dessent, 1987), but at the same time it is questionable whether this objective is actually achieved in reality by ordinary teachers. Norwich (1990) has pointed out that it is not easy to establish valid generalities about what skills, knowledge or attitudes are essential to the provision of special needs education. Nonetheless, there are certainly specific skills; knowledge and attitudes required for such teaching that cannot be learned by all teachers (Norwich, 1990:123). Certain specialisation will always be required because how pupils' difficulties may be of different kind. However, organising a holistic curriculum, using methods suitable for multi-grade teaching and facilitating interaction through such approaches might increase the possibilities of meeting pupils' individual needs in the classroom.

Teachers are the personal symbols in the educational process. The way teachers act and their perceptions influences pupils. In this personal relationship teachers' non-verbal and empathetic behaviour is characterised by subtle interpersonal interaction to which pupils are sensitive. Pupils interpret school processes and teachers' behaviour and their interpretation may affect their learning. Researchers have explained how aspects of non-verbal communication are of considerable importance for teachers: First, non-verbal messages are seen as reflections of what people are really thinking or feeling. Second, a child's ability to learn from a teacher depends on the sharing of systems of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication draws attention to features of human communication that are non-linguistic and often are overlooked as a part of the whole process. And finally, new approaches to communication are concerned with the "whole man"; communication is a process, taking place within a framework of human relationships, rather than being limited to an analysis of the source, content and reception of messages.

The search for what is really happening in small schools requires closer observation than the previous study allowed for. We can examine teachers' interaction with pupils, how they transmit symbols and their use of these subtle cues in interpersonal relations that seem to be of such great importance. In order to avoid losing details it is important to record events in the classroom, such as teachers' behaviour, teaching approaches and method of discipline. Study II is designed to deal with these issues.

## CHAPTER 6

### OBSERVATION OF TEACHERS' BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM - STUDY II

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous study (Study I) it emerged that most of the respondents agreed on the primary distinguishing characteristics of small schools being: *a close relationship between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils (79%); mixed age classes (74%); and more attention given to individuals (43%)*. However, these advantages did not always reveal themselves in the running of the schools. In relationships, attention to pupils with special needs, teaching in multi-grade classes, developing the curriculum, working with parents and co-operation, teachers' responses did not indicate that small schools offer an ideal environment. The teachers did not seem to be united around an ideology necessary for a holistic learning plan for meeting the needs of all pupils in their schools, there was overall uncertainty emerged the school curriculum in general.

In Study I the respondents reported that methods, which are especially suitable for multi-grade teaching, do not seem to be used in the small schools. Instead, teaching is dominated by individualistic methods, and pupils work by themselves, not in co-operation. This seems to create problems. Firstly, this seems to indicate that the schools have not implemented a policy for pupils' special needs. Secondly, pupils' social interaction and their own will and motivation seem to be given little consideration. It was expected that in small schools there are opportunities to develop a strong school ethos and opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to learn from each other. The teachers seem not to know of, or not be able to apply methods that have been proven to be helpful in meeting pupils' individual needs and to encourage their learning and social development. Individualistic teaching methods have been shown to prevent pupils from developing social skills and participation in creative co-operative tasks (Ainscow and

Muncey, 1987; Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Co-operative methods on the other hand, require close interaction with each pupil in the classroom where teachers and pupils transmit symbols with shared meanings (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Hargreaves (1975) explains that in reciprocally contingent interaction, each participant reacts to the other, and the behaviour of each is in part determined by the other (Hargreaves, 1975:71). The context of interaction in the classroom guides pupils and may influence their learning and social activity. This happens when pupils interpret their own behaviour, school processes and teachers' behaviour in series of interconnected sets, such as context, messages and feedback. According to symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), the pupils gradually note, assess and give meaning to the situation they are taking part in. They become able to interact accept, reject or transform in accordance with how they define or interpret. This process occurs in the social context of the classroom, the pupils 'take the role of the others'.

Symbolic interactionists define 'role' as a perspective from which a conduct is constructed, a more abstract perspective from which the individual participates in a social situation and contributes to its social acts and social objects. Thus, a role provides perspectives from which we perceive and understand others' and our own conduct. This relates to transactional models of learning in which the teacher's role is to create circumstances that help pupils to integrate their capacities and interpretations with those of significant others around them. This is because "learning involves the sharing and testing of intersubjective meanings and the negotiation of interpretations through interaction and the exercise of empathy (taking the role of other)" (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:116). The phenomenological paradigm sees the teacher's role as that of discovering children's possibilities, understanding how they learn and fostering their development (Woods, 1983:42-43). Bruner (1977) argues that the teacher is a model, he or she is a personal symbol of the educational process, a figure with whom the pupils can identify and compare themselves to (Bruner, 1977:88-90).

Children's language development rests upon interaction with significant others; parents, peers and the teacher. The discourse that contributes most to the growth of children's language capabilities and learning is the discourse that actively involves the child (Wells, 1988). Although children learn language naturally they must live in a language-stimulus environment to learn it. They need to be able to explore and question; wonder and hypothesise through a personal interaction with a teacher (Bainbridge and Malicky, 2000). Language has powerful implications in the learning process. Teachers' role in facilitating oral language development in the classroom becomes a crucial one (Stubbs, 1983). Attentive teachers are aware that all language use has a purpose behind it, they are able to receive, attend, understand, analyse, evaluate and react. This means that language not only involves talking but also non-verbal behaviour.

Researchers have explained how aspects of non-verbal communication are of considerable importance for teachers: First, non-verbal messages are seen as reflections of what people are really thinking or feeling. Second, a child's ability to learn from a teacher depends on the sharing of systems of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication draws attention to features of human communication that are non-linguistic and are often overlooked as a part of the whole process. And finally, new approaches to communication are concerned with the 'whole person', where communication is perceived as a process taking place within a framework of human relationships, but not only limited to an analysis of the source, content and reception of messages (Cohen and Manion, 1981). However, research has demonstrated that many teachers have poor interaction skills: they spend much of their time on trying to reach too many, explain too much, and do not actively listen to their students (Alexander, 1992; Mortimore et al., 1988)

The effects of non-verbal communication are not always visible or immediately observable (Gamble and Gamble, 1993). Teaching and talking is very closely bound together, and teachers can to some extent be

unaware of the complex details of the elements of interaction, which unfold constantly in front of them. This study focuses on teachers' non-verbal behaviour in small and large schools, teachers' role in the classroom and their choice activities.

The following questions are meant to explore teachers' interaction with pupils in the classroom; the interpersonal relations that seem to be of such great importance for both learning and social development.

1. What messages do teachers convey through their non-verbal behaviour? Is the teacher able to show empathic behaviour through her/his body and voice messages and be receptive and sensitive to pupils' individual needs? What is the meaning pupils may read or interpret from teachers' actions?
2. What is the nature of the teachers' leading role in the classroom? Is instruction in the classroom designed in a way that is likely to enhance pupils learning? Is there harmony in the classroom, does the teacher manage to maintain the pupils interest, and willingness to learn?
3. Is there a difference between the messages given by teachers in small and big schools? Is classroom interaction different in small and big school?

## **6.2 Aim of the Study**

The purpose of this study (Study II) was to obtain information about teachers' behaviour in the classroom. In order to achieve this objective the study was designed to provide information on two aspects of teachers' behaviour:

1. *Teachers' non-verbal behaviour*: this includes teachers' attentive behaviour, body posture, physical openness, facial expression, appropriate use of touch, use of voice, volume of voice, articulation and vocal expression. The evidence provided was



meant to identify in what way teachers make use of non-verbal communication in the classroom.

2. *Teachers' general behaviour*: to obtain extended understanding of teachers-pupil interaction in the classroom it was decided to make field notes on teachers' behaviour, their method of discipline, teaching methods, and provision for children with special needs. In connection with this it was also decided to record key words and phrases and to observe the atmosphere in the classroom.

It was decided to conduct Study II in both small and large schools to make it possible to compare teachers' perceptions in schools of different size. A systematic observation on teachers' non-verbal behaviour was carried out as well as recording commentary events during lessons in the form of field notes.

### **6.3 Pilot Study**

After aspects of non-verbal behaviour had been defined and an observation scheme designed (Appendix VI), a pilot study was carried out to ensure the accuracy of the observation and the reliability of the observation scheme. Oppenheim (1992:159-161) explains that the measuring instrument needs to behave in a fashion consistent with itself, which means that a very high proportion of the score on every occasion is due to the underlying scale variable, with a minimum of error. If differences are found between readings on the same instrument on two separate occasions, or when applied to two different objects or respondents, it must be certain that these are genuine differences or changes in the subject of measurement, and not differences which can be attributed to inconsistencies in the measuring instrument or to changes in the attendant conditions.

Therefore, it was decided that two observers should try out the observation scheme in ordinary classrooms; firstly, to try out the measurements of the observation scheme; secondly, to provide a

feedback on the defined codes of teachers' behaviour. This was done by measuring 'observers agreement'.

### 6.3.1 Measurement of Observers' Agreement

Two observers used the scale to find out to what extent they agreed with each other on the defined behaviour (observers' reliability). This also provided further feedback on the coding system itself (see 6.4.3 and Appendix VI). The pilot study was carried out in three diverse classrooms in a small school. Teachers' behaviour was recorded in each classroom, in two lessons of 40 minutes each. The observers took their seats behind the pupils. The observers sat beside each other in the classrooms and recorded the teacher's behaviour; they synchronised their observations of the teacher with five-minute intervals; and one observer monitored the time.

The agreement statistic, Cohen's Kappa was used to demonstrate point-by-point agreement and to correct for chance. The frequency of teachers' non-verbal behaviour was tallied and the amount of agreement found. Proportion of agreement actually observed and proportions of agreement expected by chance are shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Proportion of Agreement actually observed ( $P_o$ ) and Proportion of Agreement expected by Chance ( $P_c$ )

Observation	Body messages $P_o =$	Body messages $P_c$	Voice messages $P_o =$	Voice messages $P_c$
1	.86	.38	.84	.41
2	.87	.42	.90	.45
3	.60	.35	.40	.23
Average:	.77	.38	.71	.36

The actually observed agreement demonstrated in Table 6.1 is considerably better than agreement expected by chance. It is stated that, in some cases, especially when there are few coding categories and when the frequency with which those codes occur is quite disproportionate, the differences between the agreement actually observed and proportion agreement expected by chance can be quite dramatic (Bakeman and

Gottman, 1994:79). Therefore, the value of kappa (Table 6.2), although still respectable, can be considerably lower than the level of actual observed agreement in this study.

The low agreement in the 3<sup>rd</sup> observation on voice messages, shown in Table 6.1 and 6.2, was discussed amongst the observers. It was found that one of the observers had interpreted the teacher's very quiet voice as relaxed, whilst the other observer regarded the same incident as very tense. On all the other parts of the observation scheme, this teacher proved to be very tense. Such disagreement, of course, affects the kappa. The results of the observers' agreement are shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Results of Observers' Agreement

Observation	Body Messages K = Cohen's Kappa	Voice messages K =Cohen's Kappa
1.	.77	.72
2.	.77	.82
3.	.52	.21
Average	.68	.58

Bakeman and Gottman (1994:82), regard kappa less than 0.7 significant, with some concern, but the authors refer to Fleiss (1981), who characterises kappas of .40 to .60 as fair, .60 to .75 as good, and over .75 as excellent. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the pilot study seems to show that the observation scheme can be used to measure teachers' behaviour and the results can be regarded as fairly reliable. After the pilot study had been carried out, only one issue on the observation scheme was taken out and the final design of the coding scheme was completed.

Throughout the pilot study, field notes were recorded and commented on. These were key words, phrases and atmosphere in the classroom, all of which could represent extended understanding of the teachers' behaviour in the classroom, their method of discipline, teaching approaches and the their contribution to the atmosphere in the classroom. After the pilot

study, several aspects were added for the field notes. This extended the possibilities of the field notes and made the observers' focus clearer.

## **6.4 The Method**

### **6.4.1 The Sample**

Ten large and ten small schools were chosen from the schools in Northeast Iceland, and one teacher was chosen in each school. The schools were chosen in accordance with the following criteria: size of school and location. The ten large schools were indeed all the large schools in the area. Eight of those were located in towns but two of them were in the neighbourhood of towns. On the other hand, one of the small schools was located in a town. Four were located close to a town, and five were situated in remote areas, one of them so remote that travel might sometimes be a problem.

The low number of teachers in the small schools made it difficult to set conditions for the sample. However, only qualified teachers were chosen. Otherwise, the selection of teachers was based on their willingness to participate in the study at the same time as attempts were made to take their experience into account. This created problems, since in some schools there was hardly any opportunity to make intentional choices. In some instances, this meant that a teacher willing to participate in the study had to be the schools' representative and one of these had limited teaching experience.

### **6.4.2 Procedure**

The study was conducted between February and May 1997. Having chosen the schools in December 1996, twenty head teachers in schools in Northeast Iceland were approached by letter and asked if they were willing to participate in the study (Appendix IV). All the head teachers responded positively giving their permission for the study to be carried

out in their schools. Next, the head teacher at a staff meeting at which the teachers were asked to indicate their willingness to take part, introduced the study. In every school, one or more teachers came forward wanting to co-operate with the researcher. In seven small schools and eight large schools the head teachers picked out the participants. In one of those small schools and three of the large schools teachers had to be excluded because of personal connections with the researcher. In two schools, in each category, only one teacher was willing to participate, and in one of the small schools there was only one qualified teacher and indeed he was interested enough in the project to take part. These teachers were sent a letter with information about the research and the researcher (Appendix V).

The teachers were also contacted personally before a visit to the school was arranged to emphasise the purpose of the study and to create a positive attitude towards it. In this way it was possible to establish a climate of trust. Several times, visits had to be postponed because of weather conditions, which made the collection of data more time consuming.

During each visit conversation took place between teacher and researcher. The purpose of the study was explained and further information about the school was sought: size of school, size of class, teaching arrangements, teachers' years of teaching experience, and how long the teacher had taught in that particular school. Questions were also asked about children in need of special education. When negotiating access the researcher gave clear information about the research, its aim and process, vouching to keep all data in strict confidence. Yet, there may sometimes be reasons for not revealing too much about the research beforehand. Firstly, the researcher may not be able to foretell certain features. Secondly, some information given in advance may affect people's behaviour in ways that could be detrimental to the research. In this investigation (Study II), for instance, the informing of teachers that the aim of the study was to observe their verbal and non-verbal

behaviour, might have produced false results in that this particular piece of information might have led them to change their normal classroom behaviour. Therefore, the information they received was simply limited to interaction and behaviour in the classroom.

In all the schools, the structured observation of teachers' behaviour was carried out and recorded for two parallel, forty-minute sessions (6.3). The researcher took her seat behind the pupils. The seating position was also chosen so as to be least disturbing for both pupils and teachers.

In addition to the systematic observation, field notes and events were recorded. Different sets of events were distinguished and the researcher tried not to overlook details and concerns for the particular. Descriptive information was written down, such as teacher-pupil dialogues as well as physical situations and explanations of certain events. Reflective information was also included, such as the researcher's personal account of the course of inquiry. An attempt was made to make the recording detailed and accurate. In three schools the pupils approached the researcher after the observation, which was indeed the only time they approached her.

#### 6.4.3 Measures

Data was collected by structured observation and supported by field notes. To quantify teachers' behaviour, it was decided to apply structured observation to promote identical protocols when observing the same stream of behaviour in the classroom. The observation scheme was developed to observe two aspects: body messages and voice messages. To strengthen the validity of the observations, a number of codes were designed to make measurements in different ways. The measurement for the structured observation scheme was a 5-point tally, from 1 to 5, meaning always (1), often (2), sometimes (3), seldom (4), never (5). The five codes and measurements, defined for body language and the four codes and measurements for voice messages, were as follows:

**Codes for Body Language:**

*Availability:* Involves teachers' orientation towards pupils, referring both to their physical and psychological orientation.

*Measurements:* closeness / distance.

*Body posture:* Involves teachers' body posture

*Measurements:* relaxed / tense.

*Physical Openness:* Involves facing pupils with whom the teacher is interacting, as well as eye contact and leaning forward or against pupils.

*Measurements:* facing towards pupils / eye contact / leaning.

*Facial Expression:* Involves showing interest and concern, as well as surprise and anger.

*Measurements:* interest / concern, surprise / anger.

*Appropriate use of touch:* Includes appropriate use of touch.

*Measurements:* touching hands / arms / shoulders.

**Codes for Voice messages:**

*Use of voice:* Involves voice messages in relation to teacher/pupil interaction in the classroom.

*Measurements:* speaking quickly / softly / little.

*Volume:* Refers to whether or not the teacher speaks loudly or quietly.

*Measurements:* loud / quiet.

*Articulation:* Refers to the distinctness and clarity of speech.

*Measurements:* clear voice / unclear voice, interactive or reflective voice.

*Vocal Expression:* Refers to how one uses his/her voice to express major feelings and feeling nuances.

*Measurements:* interested / anger / contempt / sadness / boredom.

The field notes made during the structured observation included features of pupils' tasks and behaviour, teachers' comments and methods, notes on the atmosphere in the classroom; all of which could represent extended understanding of interaction in the classroom and of teachers' behaviour. Special attention was given to provisions for pupils in need of special education.

#### 6.4.4 Analyses

Data on teachers' behaviour, which was collected by the structured observation was analysed according to class size and type of class (single-age, multi-grade). The data was also analysed according to teachers' experience and gender and teachers' individual behaviour was analysed and compared. A range of statistical tests was used to investigate relationships between the variables.

The 'average' teacher's behaviour was demonstrated and the probability of this behaviour. It was decided to exclude two features from the observation scheme: 'pauses' and 'emphases', since they seemed not to reveal much about the teacher's behaviour. Also, it appeared those two codes, 'tense' and 'relaxed' were apparently measuring the same phenomenon; only 'relaxed' needed to be included.

The field notes were analysed both descriptively and reflectively. The description of the physical situation was carried out and events and comments were analysed. But, the notes also provided detailed reflective information, as the researcher's account of the course of inquiry was included in the analysis.

In order to describe and explain teachers' behaviour and actions in each type of school, interpretational analysis was used. This required the detection of constructs and patterns in the teacher's behaviour (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996:562). A set of categories, which adequately encompassed and summarised the data, was developed (Table 6.5 and



Table 6.6). In order to quantify teachers' behaviour, four categories for field notes were defined and a scale made for each category. The responses were coded and entered in the data structure suitable for the programme 'Statistica'. Measurements were 1-4, with 4 the highest score and 1 the lowest. The categories were as follows:

Teaching approach:

*Differentiation - Individualistic* tasks according to each pupil's needs and the teacher teaching each child on its own (code 3)

*Whole class - Individualistic* the teacher is teaching the whole class for a while and then teaching each child on its own (code 2)

*Whole class - Same task* – all pupils are provided the same task (code 1)

Measurements were 1-3, with 3 as the most appropriate teaching method and 1 as the least appropriate.

**Method of discipline:**

*Harmony* – balanced atmosphere in the classroom, resulting in pupils' being relaxed and concentrating on tasks (intrinsic discipline) (code 4)

*Good order* – well organised classroom and arrangements – the pupils functioning according to rules (extrinsic discipline) (code 3)

*Strict order* – strictly organised, rules seem to be rigorous and might be inhibiting (enforced discipline) (code 1)

*Confused* - classroom disorganised, resulting in pupils being distributed (lack of discipline) (code 1)

Measurements were 1-4, with 4 as the most appropriate method of discipline and 1 as the least appropriate.

Teachers' behaviour:

*Empathetic – Encouraging* - continuous awareness of pupils conditions, their communication and the meanings of words and signs, directly encouraging (code 3)

*Encouraging* – directly encouraging and attending to pupils (code 2)

*Distant* - a lack of attention and consideration (code 1)

Measurements were 1-3, with 3 as the most appropriate behaviour and 1 as the least appropriate behaviour.

**Provision for children with SEN:**

*IEP* – pupil with special needs working according to an individualistic educational programme, specially designed to pupils needs. There might be either the class teacher only teaching the class or a special teacher with her/him (code 2)

*None* –special provisions not provided (code 1)

Measurements were 1-2, with 2 as the most appropriate provision and 1 as the least appropriate provision.

## **6.5 Results**

This section presents the findings from the analysis of the quantitative data gathered through structured observation and the qualitative and quantitative data gathered by field notes. The results include the analyses of both the structured observation and the field notes simultaneously. But first the sample will be presented.

### **6.5.1 The Sample**

Table 6.3 and 6.4 show the final sample. This is size of schools, number of pupils in each of the classes, pupils' age, pupils with special educational needs, the extent of teaching experience and individual teaching experience in that particular school.

Table 6.3 Small Schools: Size, Number of Pupils, Pupils' Age, Pupils with Special Needs and Teachers' Experience

Sch	Number of pupils in the school	Number of pupils in the class	Pupils' age	Number of pupils in the class with special needs	The teachers' teaching experience in years	The teachers' years of teaching in this school
1	50	8	7-8	2	15	1
2	75	15	8	3	10	1
3	86	9	10	4	10	1
4	60	7	6	3	21	21
5	73	10	10-11	3	6	6
6	50	10	10-11	4	7	7
7	75	11	11-12	1	6	6
8	12	6	6-8	0	23	3
9	54	10	6-7	3	3	3
10	32	10	6-7	1	27	2
Aver Age	56.7	9.6	8.4	2.4	13	5.2
%				25		

Table 6.4 Large Schools: Size, Number of Pupils, Pupils' Age, Pupils with Special Needs and Teachers' Experience

Sch	Number of pupils in the school	Number of pupils in the class	Pupils' age	Number of pupils in the class with special needs	The teachers' teaching experience in years	The teachers' years of teaching in this school
11	280	22	12	2	32	21
12	340	13	6	1	17	13
13	172	17	8	2	21	10
14	350	18	10	4	16	10
15	621	18	11	4	10	10
16	130	13	6	3	25	25
17	434	25	10	6	25	8
18	495	22	8	1	15	6
19	110	15	10-11	2	15	10
20	154	15	10	2	5	1
Aver Age	308.6	17.8	9.2	2.7	18	11.4
%				15		

As is shown in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4, the size of the schools varied significantly; the biggest school in the sample had 621 pupils; the smallest had only 12 pupils. The average number of pupils in the large schools was 308.6, compared with 56.7 pupils in the small schools. In all the small schools the number of pupils in each class was low, with an average of 9.6 pupils in the small schools, against 17.8 in the large schools. In the two largest classes the number of pupils was 22 and 25,

against six and seven pupils in the smallest classes in the small schools. Seven classes in the small schools were multi-grade classes, with six two-age groups and one three-age group and there was one multi-grade class in the group of large schools. It is noteworthy how many pupils are reported with special educational needs in the small schools. The very low number of pupils in the classes, which should make it easier to provide pupils with individual attention does not appear to have reduced the number of pupils with special needs (25% in small schools, against 15% in large schools). Teachers' length of teaching experience varied greatly, i.e., from three years to 32 years. This was to be expected, as the choice of respondents was limited (6.4.1). The average teaching experience in small schools was 13 years and in the large schools, 18 years (Table 6.3 and Table 6.4). Three teachers in the small schools had only taught seven years or less, with one teacher from a large school having had only five years. Teachers in large schools seem to stay on for comparatively longer period of time. In this sample, teachers in small schools had taught, on average, only 5.1 years in that particular school compared with teachers in large schools having the average of 11.4 ( $t=1.73$ ,  $p=0.04$ ). Teachers' diverse teaching experiences may affect the comparison of large and small schools since longer experience may have brought about increased and better adjustment to classroom work.

Of the twenty teachers in the sample, there were six male (30%) teachers and 14 (70%) female teachers. This reflects the general teaching population. In 1997, female teachers in Iceland were 73% against 27% men. In Northeast Iceland the balance teachers were 69% female against 31% men (Statistics of Iceland, III, 1998: 251).

### 6.5.2 Teachers' Behaviour

On the whole, the data from the structured observation showed that there was hardly any significant difference in teachers' behaviour according to type of school, size of class, teaching experience, or gender.

Significant difference was only to be found in availability, with teachers of small schools being more available than others ( $t=2.07$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $p=0.025$ ). In the present context, availability refers to the way teachers oriented themselves physically and psychologically in the presence of pupils. In other words, how close or distant they were. The orientation may indicate teachers' physical or psychological closeness. It may also relate to the teaching method used such as individualistic teaching, when teachers teach each child on its own, which was found to be used by many teachers as a main teaching approach in the small schools (Study I, Study II, Study III).

No significant difference was found in teachers' behaviour in small and large schools regarding teachers' body posture, which involved how relaxed or tense the teachers were, or physical openness. Physical openness included in what way the teachers faced pupils, eye contact and how they leaned towards them. The teachers faced pupils ( $\bar{x} = 2.17$ ), eye contact was sometimes used ( $\bar{x} = 2.92$ ) but teachers seldom leaned towards pupils ( $\bar{x} = 3.46$ ). In both types of schools, teachers showed interest ( $\bar{x} = 1.98$ ) and concern ( $\bar{x} = 1.73$ ) but no significant difference was found in their facial expression relating to these issues. When observing appropriate use of touch no significant difference was found either and teachers very seldom touched pupils ( $\bar{x} = 4.68$ ). Moreover, no significant difference was found in teachers' use of voice, in relation to their interaction with pupils, in the two types of schools. Most teachers spoke softly ( $\bar{x} = 1.67$ ) and little ( $\bar{x} = 1.95$ ) but no significant difference was found in the volume of their voice. Teachers' articulation was observed and no significant difference was found, the teachers spoke very clearly ( $\bar{x} = 1.47$ ), they were interactive ( $\bar{x} = 2.24$ ) and reflective ( $\bar{x} = 2.39$ ). Teachers' vocal expression was examined and no significant difference was found in their expression of their feelings and feeling nuances like interest ( $\bar{x} = 2.07$ ) anger ( $\bar{x} = 4.86$ ) or sadness ( $\bar{x} = 4.70$ ).

Although, the analysis of the structured observation hardly showed any significant difference in teachers' behaviour relating to size of school,

size of class, teaching experience or gender, the analysis of the field notes showed difference in teachers' behaviour in the classroom. This difference was also found to relate to teachers' teaching experience and gender. It seems that the quantitative coding was not sufficiently sensitive. This may relate to the frequency of recording of. This was done with five minutes intervals, which might be too infrequent; a more frequent recording might have been needed. It may also have been preferable to use the scale over a longer period of time.

Table 6.5 and 6.6 show the physical situation and events in classrooms in both big and small schools. In addition, the researcher's personal account comes into view through comments.

Table 6.5 Field Notes in Small Schools

Sch.	N Pupils in class	Pupils' age	Teachers' teaching experience	Number pupils with SEN and provision	Teaching approach	Method of discipline	Teachers' behaviour	Comments: The teacher/ teachers	Comments: The pupils
1	8	7-8	15	(2) Individual istic	Individual- istic Same task	Harmony Good order	Empathetic Encourage	Very good harmony. Caring	Pupils active
2	15	8	10	(3) IEP Special teacher	Individual- istic Same task	Good order	Distracted Encourage	Teacher very sad, discontent and passive, is not present somehow but organised	
3	9	10	10	(4) Individual istic	Individual- istic Same task Whole class	Harmony, Good order	Encourage Empathetic	Teacher explains well	Pupils very interested Independent
4	7	6	21	(3) None	Five pupils in a queue at teachers' desk. Two pupils not working at all	Very Confused Distant	Distant Passive	Teacher uneasy. No response because of the children under desk, others sitting at the teacher desk	Two children stay, lie under a table most of the time, not working
5	10	10-11	6	(3) IEP Special teacher	Differentiation	Harmony Good order	Empathetic Encourage	Very good harmony. Classroom well organised	Pupils very industrious, talking a little
6	10	10-11	7	(4) IEP Individual istic	Individual- istic Same task	Harmony Good order	Empathetic Encourage	Classroom well organised. Very good balance, clear messages	P industrious, talking a little
7	11	10-12	6	(1) IEP	Individual- istic Same task Whole class	Good order Harmony	Empathetic Encourage	Teacher very relaxed, pleasant Atmosphere in the class pleasant	All pupils get teachers' attention
8	6	6-8	23	(0)	Differentiation	Good order	Encourage Distant	Teacher very restless, absent, disorganised	Pupils working well
9	10	6-7	3	(3) Special Teacher	Individual- istic Same task	Strict order	Encourage Distant	Teacher in front of the class most of the time. Seems bored	Pupils working well
10	10	6-7	27	(1) IEP	Individual- istic Same task	Strict order	Encourage Distant	Very strict order in class	Pupils assisting the SEN. Pupils freely asking for help Industrious

*Method of discipline:* (1) harmony, (2) good order, (3) strict order, (4) confused

*Teaching method:* (1) differentiation / individualistic, (2) whole class / individualistic, (3) whole class / same task for all

*Teachers' behaviour:* (1) empathetic, (2) encouraging, (4) distant

*Provision for children with special needs:* (1) IEP, (2) none

Table 6.6 Field Notes in Large Schools

Sch.	N Pupils in class	Pupils' age	Teachers' teaching experience	Number pupils with SEN and provision	Teaching approach	Method of discipline	Teachers' behaviour	Comments: The teacher/ teachers	Comments: The pupils
11	22	12	32	(2) IEP	Whole class Groups Differentiation	Confused	Distant	T walks out of the CL. Talks in front the class while many are talking	Little attention
12	13	6	13	(1) IEP	Whole class Individualistic Same task	Harmony Good order	Empathy Encourage	Teacher well prepared, <i>organised</i>	Pupils very industrious. SEN crying but pupils Are not interrupted
13	17	8	21	(2) None	Whole class Same task	Beg: good order  Later: confused	Encourage Distant	Irony but also praising a lot. Always in front of the cl. Disorganised teaching	Pupils restless
14	18	10	16	(4) IEP Special Teacher	Differentiation	Harmony Good order	Empathy Encourage	Clear explanation in front of class, well organised	All pupils Industrious
15	18	11	10	(4) IEP Special Teacher	Individualistic Differentiation	Harmony Good order	Empathy Encourage	Both teachers seem to take care of SEN, equally	Pupils independ., Very relaxed atmosphere
16	13	6	25	(3) IEP	Whole class Individualistic Same task	Strict order Confused	Distant	Strong emphasise on discipline. Constantly reminding how to behave	Pupils seem to be tense
17	25	10	25	(6) IEP Special Teacher	Whole class Individualistic Same task	Harmony Good order	Empathy Encourage	Very warm atmosphere. The teacher determined and very empathetic	Pupils very industrious, talking, discussing
18	22	8	15	(1) Special Teacher	Individualistic Same task Whole class	Harmony Good order	Empathy Interested Encourage	Effortless teaching, nothing changed in the whole lesson	Pupils industrious, chatting quietly
19	15	10-11	15	(2) IEP	Whole class Group work Differentiation	Harmony, good order	Empathy Encourage	Teacher very cheerful, very good understanding and good planning	All pupils in a circle, rapid change of tasks
20	15	10	5	(2) None	Whole class Same task	Strict order Confused	Distant Passive	The teacher arrives, gives commands, assertive, no interaction or reflection T. went out for a cup of coffee	Pupils at teachers' desk one by one, a queue. SEN pupil gets no extra help

*Method of discipline:* (1) harmony, (2) good order, (3) strict order, (4) confused

*Teaching method:* (1) differentiation / individualistic, (2) whole class / individualistic, (3) whole class / same task for all

*Teachers' behaviour:* (1) empathetic, (2) encouraging, (4) distant

*Provision for children with special needs:* (1) IEP, (2) none



As appears in Table 6.5 and 6.6, the most common teaching approach in the small schools was individualistic teaching with all pupils working on the same task. This was observed in seven classrooms (70%) in small schools, of which five were multi-graded. Individualistic teaching was applied in four (40%) of the large schools, but differed from what was observed in the small schools, since the teaching started by whole class teaching (Table 6.6). Two teachers in the large schools taught in front of the class for over half of the teaching time, wanting all the pupils to concentrate on the same task, including the four pupils with special educational needs (Table 6.6). Differentiation, with all pupils' needs in mind, was rare in all the schools. In three classes in the large schools all the pupils were given differentiated tasks according to their needs, and this was observed in two of the small schools (Table 6.5 and 6.6).

In Table 6.5 and 6.6, it also appears, that in five small schools and six large schools the discipline was harmonious, the atmosphere was balanced, and pupils were relaxed and concentrated on their tasks. In these classrooms the method of discipline seemed to be intrinsic. The teachers showed empathetic and encouraging behaviour. In two small schools there was a good order, the classroom was well organised and well arranged, but the harmonic atmosphere was not there. In these two schools, the pupils were functioning according to rules and the discipline seemed to be extrinsic. In two classes in each category of the schools, there was a strict order, rules seemed to be rigorous and might have been inhibiting, as the discipline seemed to be enforced on pupils. In two classes in the large schools and one in a small school a method of discipline was missing, although one of these teachers started the day in a good way, he lost control of the class as the time went on.

It is remarkable how many children in the sample were reported with special educational needs. This refers particularly to the small schools, where 25% of the pupils were reported to have special needs, which is significantly different from what was reported in the large schools (14%)

(Table 6.5 and 6.6). In Table 6.7 it appears that these pupils' difficulties varied:

Table 6.7 Pupils in Large and Small Schools reported with Special Needs

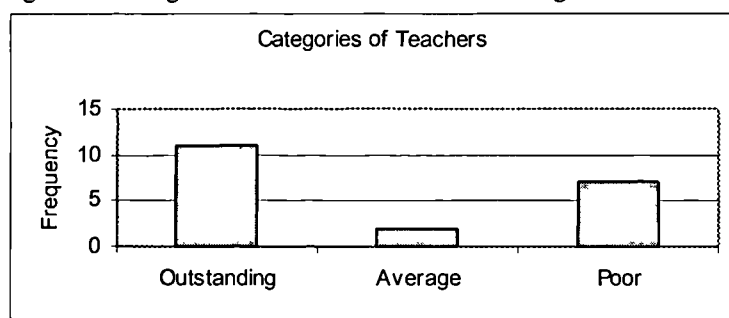
Category	Number pupils with special needs in the small schools in the sample (96)	Number pupils with special needs in the large schools in the sample (178)
General learning difficulties	13	7
Reading difficulties	3	11
Severe disabilities	1	3
Social and/or emotional difficulties	5	3
Language problems	2	1
Total	24 (25%)	25 (15%)

Table 6.7 shows that the most frequent difficulties in the classes were general learning difficulties and this emerged significantly more often in the small classes (14%) than in the larger classes (4%). Few pupils in the classes seemed to have language or reading problems or less than 0.5%, in both types of schools (Table 6.7), which is less than might be expected. The provisions for these pupils differed but most often the teachers reported that these were provided with individual educational programme (Table 6.5 and Table 6.6). In eight classes in the small schools and in seven classes in the large schools, these children were provided with special programmes. In three small schools, a special teacher took part in the teaching, and this was the case in four of the large schools. However, in two large schools and in one small school there was no special arrangement for the seven pupils concerned (Table 6.5 and Table 6.6). This might indicate a lack of expertise or support in the field. In one class of seven pupils, three of them had special educational needs but no particular provision was observed. In this class, the teacher had problems. Neither a method of teaching nor a method of discipline was observed, the teacher seemed puzzled, resulting in the pupils being confused. While five children stood in a queue at the

teachers' desk, waiting for attention, two children lay under a table, played and made noises.

As appears above, the results from the field notes showed difference in teachers' behaviour but this was not according to size of school or size of class. Moreover, the methods of teaching did not vary a lot in the two categories of schools. The same can be said about the method of discipline in the classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers' practice in the classrooms varied. In order to quantify this difference, teachers' behaviour was categorised in three categories according to the defined concepts (p. 189-190). The categories were: *outstanding*, *average* and *poor teachers*, (Figure 1):

Figure 6.1 Categories of Teachers in Small and Large Schools

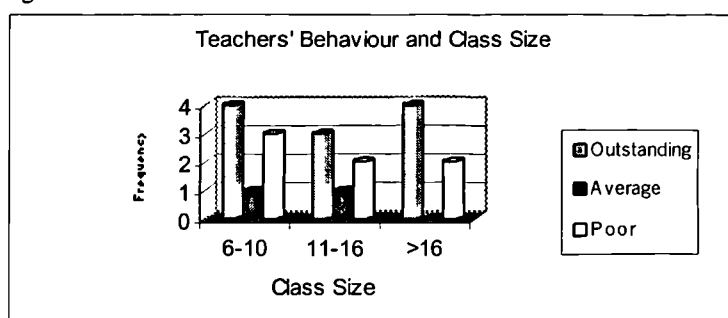


As is shown in Figure 6.1, there were eleven (55%) outstanding teachers in the sample, six in large schools and five in small schools. These teachers had created harmony in the classrooms, they organised their teaching methods according to the diverse needs of each child and they showed empathetic and encouraging behaviour. This means that they showed continuous awareness of pupils' conditions and were attentive to their verbal and nonverbal behaviour. On the other hand, the two teachers categorised, average (10%) taught the whole class the same task and then attended to individuals. These teachers established good order but did not show empathy or encouraging behaviour in the classroom. Their use of teaching methods was monotonous.

As many as seven teachers in the sample (35%), fall in the category of being 'poor' teachers. They provided all pupils with the same task and did not seem to consider pupils' individual needs. These teachers were distant or distracted. Their method of discipline was strict and in some cases their work was disorganised, resulting in pupils being confused.

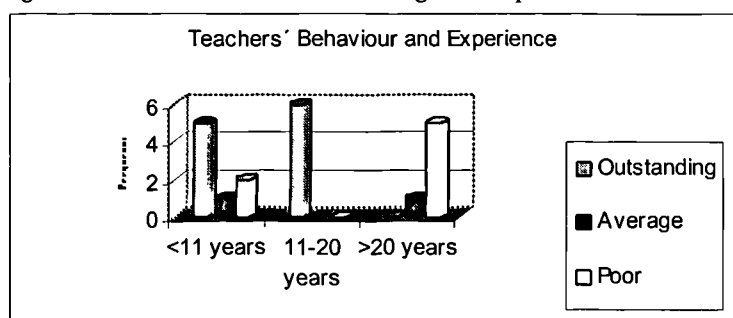
It is noteworthy, that there was not a significant difference in teachers' behaviour according to size of class (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Teachers' Behaviour and Size of Class.



Teachers (55%) in both categories of schools created harmony in the classroom, showed empathetic behaviour, organised differentiated tasks and provided for pupils' special needs. It is remarkable, that the number poor and average teachers, teaching a small class were higher than the number of poor and average teachers teaching in larger classes. In three of the smallest classes with six to ten pupils, the teachers were distant and kept strict order and tasks did not seem to be suited to pupils' individual needs. It also appeared that teachers with the longest teaching experience showed the clearest sign on exhaustion (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3 Teachers Behaviour and length of Experience



Of the respondents who had 11-20 years teaching experience, there were no poor teachers, which seems to indicate that they are still active and interested. Of the seven teachers who fell in the category of poor teachers, five had over twenty years of teaching experience, but the two other had taught less than ten years. The longer teachers working career teachers have, the more worn-out they seemed to be and the more lacking in motivation.

The two teachers, categorised as 'average teacher' were both men and three of the seven 'poor teachers' were also men. Only one male teacher fell in the group of outstanding teachers. This is a significant difference. Therefore, the indication is that female teachers are more committed to their work than men; they seem to be more receptive and able to show empathetic behaviour; and they organise their work in a more professional manner.

## **6.6 Discussion**

The aim of this study was to obtain information about the nature of teachers' behaviour in the classroom. In order to achieve this objective the study was designed to provide information on two main aspects: teachers' non-verbal behaviour, and teachers' behaviour as it materialises through events in the classroom. To make it possible to compare teachers' behaviour, the study was carried out in both small and large schools. Beside a systematic observation on teachers' non-verbal behaviour, field notes were recorded on events in the classroom.

The theory of the Study II made the following prediction: In order to contribute to pupils' educational and social development and thereby help them 'to be' (Delors, 1996), successful interaction in the classroom is essential. Pupils act according to their perception and choices of interconnected sets, such as context, messages and feedback. They interpret teachers' actions, which involves both their verbal and non-verbal behaviour as well as the structure of the teaching. In this way

teachers' behaviour has effects on pupils' self-consciousness, their social development and learning, not least the learning of pupils with special needs, who are in need for extended attention. As a result, the quality of teachers' behaviour may be of vital importance.

The analysis of the structured observation showed no significant difference in teachers' behaviour in small and large schools with regard to teachers' body posture, physical openness, facial expression, appropriate use of touch or use of voice. Significant difference was only to be found in how the teachers oriented themselves physically and psychologically in the presence of pupils that is in availability. Taking the size of classes into account, this might have been foreseen. However, the analysis of the field notes showed that teachers' practice and behaviour in the classrooms varied greatly; between teachers, according to teacher experience and between genders. Teachers' behaviour in relation to their practice in the classroom was grouped in three categories: *outstanding*, *average* and *poor teachers*.

The *outstanding teachers* (55%) were all female teachers (10) but one. They had created harmony in the classrooms, organised the teaching according to the diverse needs of each child and showed empathetic and encouraging behaviour. This means that they showed continuous awareness of pupils' conditions and were attentive to their verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The discipline in the classrooms seemed to be intrinsic and it was observed that these teachers spoke with a low, soft voice, which again was reflected in pupils' way of speaking. Last but not least, they had arranged special programmes for pupils with special needs. On the other hand, the teachers categorised, *average teachers* (10%) taught the whole class the same task and then attended to individuals. These teachers established good order, but the discipline seemed to be extrinsic. These teachers did hardly show empathy or encouraging behaviour in the classroom. These teachers were more male teachers. The *poor teachers* (35%) provided all pupils with the same task and did not seem to consider pupils' individual needs. They seemed

to be distant or distracted and the method of discipline in the classroom was strict or totally missing. These teachers' work was disorganised, resulting in pupils being confused. Just fewer than three quarters of these teachers had over twenty years of teaching experience and three out of seven were male teachers.

This outcome indicates that just over half of the teachers facilitated pupils learning in a constructive way and in their interaction they set a good example for pupils and respect individual differences. The organisational framework seemed to provide opportunities for the pupils to interact with other children and the teacher. The learning opportunities within the curriculum were individualised to correspond to individual needs, interest and abilities.

On the other hand, the poor teachers provided homogeneous teaching methods and management and the quality of their interaction with the pupil was poor and even uneasy. The low number of pupils in the classes did not seem to make it easier for these teachers to organise their teaching. This situation might prevent pupils' development. Hirst and Peters (1991), distinguish between biological needs, psychological needs, basic needs and functional needs. They claim that the concept of 'need' is always related to conceptions of value and motivation. They argue that every child has deep-seated psychological needs, which are motivational needs. These needs are especially relevant to the content and methods of learning; the needs for stimulation, novelty and environmental mastery. A failure to satisfy such needs may affect the child's development.

Differentiation was only observed in four large schools and two small schools. Differentiation is a process, which involves analysing each pupil's needs, his or her experience, knowledge, understanding, attitude and skills, and finding the most effective means of meeting these needs (Weston, 1992:6; Hall, 1992:20). It is argued that differentiation is the prerequisite for pupils to approach a task on their own premises (Peters,

1992:5). Instead, the most common teaching approach in the small schools was individualistic teaching with all pupils working on the same task. This is the case, in spite of the multi-grade classes and the very small number pupils in each class, with the average number of pupils in each class being only 9.6 pupils.

The emphasis on individualistic teaching may influence pupils' social development. The pupils are not working together to accomplish shared goals and tasks; they are not encouraged to be more skilful in learning co-operatively. This does not indicate that there are not pupils in the classes who need extended individual attention. Dean (1992) maintains that every class is made up of individuals who will be in need of distinct attention. Those are pupils with low ability; those with specific learning problems; those with behaviour or emotional problems; those with gaps in their schooling; those with language problems; and those with outstanding ability of some kind.

A high proportion of children in the sample were reported with special educational needs, but particularly in the small schools (25%, against 14%). These pupils' difficulties varied but the most frequent difficulties were general learning difficulties and this emerged significantly more often in the small classes (14%) than in the larger classes (4%). These children obtained their education in the ordinary class and in three fourth of the classes the children were provided with special programmes. In one third of the schools, a special teacher took part in the teaching. Norwich (1990) argues that identifying special needs, involves understanding what provision is needed. A lack of expertise or support in the field was found in some of the schools, as in three classes there were no special arrangements for the seven pupils with special needs.

The poor teachers were also distant and lacked consideration. They seemed neither to be aware of pupils' conditions, nor were they encouraging. It is the teacher who is responsible for making interaction work in the teaching and learning process that takes place in the



classroom. Bruner (1977) argues that the teacher is a model, he or she is a personal symbol of the educational process, a figure with whom the pupils can identify with and compare themselves to (Bruner, 1977:88-90). Cohen and Manion (1981) maintain that aspects of non-verbal communication are of considerable importance as a child's ability to learn from a teacher depends on the sharing of systems of non-verbal communication. From Mead's (1934) sociological viewpoint, the conscious mind, self-awareness and self-regulation are central and he viewed human thought, experience and behaviour as basically social. He saw communication become meaningful through shared significant symbols. The self is constructed through communication and social activity and becomes possible through the process of role taking (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). This social interaction may include understanding context, i.e. shared experience which is relevant to each participant; understanding turn taking, along with body and facial gestures and the ability to express ideas as they occur and give feedback. Through taking the role of the other, the self acquires its reflexive quality and attains self-consciousness (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). This process is regarded vital for social life and co-operative activity (Woods, 1983).

The study may have limitations, which relate to a) the recording of behaviour in the systematic observation, b) the instrument itself and c) the researcher's effect.

Although the accuracy of the observation scheme had been tested and could be regarded as fairly reliable, the quantitative coding proved not to be sufficiently sensitive. First, the recording was done with five minutes intervals. A more frequent recording might have been needed and it would have been preferable to carry out the observations over a longer period of time in each classroom. This might have created a variety of contexts and brought the researcher closer to the core of the activities of the classes.

Second, criticism connected with predetermined categories is that such a system may not easily fit different conditions (McIntyre and MacLeod, 1993), or there may be a lack of connection between single codes, and they may only illustrate the 'average' or 'typical' classroom, rather than actual situations (Hamilton and Delamont, 1984). A lack of connection between single codes was not found, and the observation scheme seemed to fit well to different situations, but it seemed to measure the average classroom rather than teachers' individual behaviour. Therefore, the instrument itself might have failed to provide valid evidence about teachers' behaviour and important questions might not have been answered.

However, the field notes helped to rectify these complications. By recording teachers' behaviour, the researcher did not lose the detail of the teacher-pupil interaction or the concern for the particular (Hargreaves, 1975). The field notes, also helped to learn about physical settings, and focus on overt and observable behaviour, which means that meaningful behaviour was not lost from view (Burgess, 1986:181). Thus, it may be asserted that valid evidence about the actions of the subject of study was obvious to the observer, through both objective reality of activities and subjective meanings and symbols (Blumer, 1979). In this way, an attempt was made to take into account the meaning teachers devoted to their interaction and important questions about what determines teachers' actions were answered.

During the observations, the researcher had to rely on her own perception, which may cause bias. According to symbolic interactionism people focus on the world of subjective meanings and the symbols by which meaning is produced and represented, and are keen to explore the properties and dimensions of these processes (Woods, 1979). In this study, during classroom observation, the researcher was concerned with the objective reality of activities, as well as the observed subjective meanings and symbols by which they were produced and represented, and she tried to be aware of the risk of making prior assumptions. It may

be difficult to analyse thought and actions, but Woods (1983) argues that close observation and sympathetic interviewing can bring the researcher close to the core of social interchange. Adler and Adler (1994) maintain that using several observers can enhance the validity of observations, as the findings may then be crosschecked. In this study, such arrangement was not possible. However, the teachers' answers from the interviews both enriched and confirmed the researcher's perceptions, which increased the validity of the studies as a whole. It also helped that the observations were conducted systematically and repeatedly in various contexts, without problems. This is in accordance with what Delamont has suggested; different kinds of classrooms need to be examined, as comparative studies may provide a stimulus to looking at familiar settings (Burgess, 1984).

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF THEIR INTERACTION AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM - STUDY III**

#### ***7.1 Introduction***

In the preceding chapter, it emerged that there seems to be a connection between teachers' behaviour and the atmosphere in the classroom. The findings seem to indicate a relation between teachers' empathetic behaviour, discipline and how teachers deal with pupils' individual needs. Just over half of the teachers in the sample were categorised as being outstanding, while about one third seemed to be poor teachers. The behaviour of these two groups of teachers was very different. The outstanding teachers seemed to be aware of pupils' conditions, and their communication and the meaning of words and signs. Their interaction with pupils was constructive.

It has been found that teacher-pupil interaction plays a vital part in children's learning (Bruner, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). This interaction occurs while teachers are teaching, listening, supporting pupils or holding personal conversation. Several research studies have provided evidence on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom, on the effect of this subtle interaction between the teacher and pupils, and also how teachers' behaviour may influence this interaction (Alexander, 1992; Croll and Moses, 1985; Carr and Krutz-Costes, 1994). Further, research has clarified how the quality of interaction may facilitate learning generally, and specifically the learning of pupils with disabilities (Butler, 1994; Hare, 1993; Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Other studies have revealed that teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom is a sequence of extremely short interactions (Alexander, 1992). Carr and Krutz-Costes (1994) found that teachers are fairly accurate in evaluating children's academic ability and metacognition, but teachers tended to view high ability children more favourably than low ability children (Carr and

Krutz-Costes, 1994). However, Croll and Moses (1985) found that teachers are more occupied with children with special educational needs than they are with other pupils, although the time spent on giving individual attention to both these groups of children was small.

If a teacher is to meet the needs of all the children in the classroom, a thorough understanding of the individual and of individual differences is required on the part of the teacher as well as being able to apply various teaching approaches to these needs. It is recognised that teachers' understanding of children's abilities and expectations does influence children and their learning, and pupils are well aware of teachers' perceptions (Butler, 1994).

It has been found that teachers in small schools have the significant advantage of being able to give pupils personal attention and to recognise pupils' individual needs. In spite of multi-grade classes in small schools, the small number of pupils can enable teachers to meet individual needs and enhance pupils' participation (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Galton and Patrick, 1990; Melheim, 1998; Waugh, 1991). This can also include pupils with disabilities because the learning environment can be adjusted towards meeting each child's potential (Hayes and Livingstone, 1986; Tomlinson, 1990; Hopkins and Ellis, 1991). Teachers may not always be aware of how they may influence pupils.

The following questions are meant to explore teachers' understanding of teacher-pupil interaction and learning in the classroom; the interpersonal relations and choice of methods that seem to be of such great importance for both learning and social development.

1. What is teachers' understanding of pupils' individual needs and in what way do they think these needs are best met? How do teachers discover pupils' individual needs, gather information about their needs and provide for such needs in the curriculum?

2. What is teachers' own understanding of their behaviour in the classroom? What abilities and skills do they consider important with regard to teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom? This includes both teachers' understanding of their use of non-verbal behaviour as well as the choice of teaching approaches and tasks.

3. How do teachers think they can best convey interpersonal skills such as empathy, interest, and trust in the classroom and thereby show understanding of pupils' needs? How do teachers' view the importance of such interpersonal skills in the teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom?

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of the qualitative data collected to explore teachers' view on the nature of the teachers' interaction and behaviour in the classroom. This includes teachers' understanding of pupils' individual needs, how they think their understanding is reflected in their awareness and empathetic behaviour, and how they think their interaction with pupils may facilitate relationships.

## ***7.2 Aim of the Study***

Interviews with teachers in small and large schools were intended to determine:

1. information about teachers' understanding of pupils' needs,
2. teachers' understanding of their own verbal and non-verbal behaviour,
3. teachers' belief of the interaction in the classroom,
4. information of teachers' relationships with parents and colleagues,
5. information about teaching.

The main aim of the study was to provide information about what behaviour is meaningful for teachers who have the responsibility to meet the needs of all children in the classroom and also of those with the

greatest needs. This includes information about teachers' attitude and acceptance of pupils, as well as their knowledge and skills to undertake the various aspects of interaction that occurs in a classroom.

Furthermore, the purpose was to gain information about teachers' links with parents and colleagues and how the nature of those relationships could affect pupils and teaching.

### **7.3 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted before the interview questions were finally structured (Appendix VII). Five professionals who all had taught in both small and large schools were willing to participate. The interviews were tape-recorded. This was a useful procedure, as the teaching experience of the individuals who were interviewed, from the two types of schools became apparent and resulted in some changes to the questions.

### **7.4 Method**

#### **7.4.1 The Sample**

Ten large and ten small schools were chosen from all schools in Northeast Iceland and one teacher was chosen for the sample in each school (This is the same sample as in Study II). The schools were chosen in accordance with the following criteria: size of school and location. The ten large schools did in fact constitute all the large schools in the area. Due to this it was not possible to make a random selection of the large schools. Eight of the large schools were located in towns but two were close to towns. There were seventeen small schools in the area. Of those selected, one was located in a town, four were located close to a town, and five were situated in remote areas. One school was indeed so remote that visits were sometime a problem.

The low number of teachers in the small schools made it difficult to set conditions for the sample. However, only qualified teachers were

chosen. Otherwise, the selection of teachers was based on their willingness to participate in the study at the same time as attempts were made to take their experience into account. This created problems, since in some schools there was hardly any opportunity to make intentional choices. In some instances, this meant that a teacher who was willing to participate in the study had to be the schools' representative, and one of these teachers had limited teaching experience.

#### 7.4.2 Procedure

The study was conducted in February-May, 1997. Having chosen the schools in December 1996, 20 head teachers in schools in Northeast Iceland were approached by letter and asked if they were willing to participate in the study (Appendix IV). All the head teachers reacted positively giving their permission for the study to be carried out in their schools. Next, the head teacher introduced the study at a staff meeting and asked teachers to indicate whether they would be willing to take part in the study. In every school, one or more teachers came forward as willing to co-operate with the researcher. In seven small schools and eight large schools the head teachers picked out the participants. In one of those small schools, and in three of the large schools teachers had to be excluded because of personal connections with the researcher. In two schools, in each category only one teacher was willing to participate, and in one of the small schools there was only one qualified teacher and this teacher did agree to take part in the project.

The teachers were contacted personally before a visit to the school was arranged. This was done to emphasise the purpose of the study and to create a positive attitude towards it. In this way it was possible to establish a climate of trust. Several times, visits had to be postponed because of weather conditions, which made the collection of data more time consuming.



During each visit, a conversation took place between the teacher and the researcher. The purpose of the study was explained. When negotiating access the researcher gave clear information about the research, its aim and process, vouching to keep all data in strict confidence.

When the structured observation (Study II) had been conducted the semi-structured interviews were carried out. Because an interview is thought to be a process of reality construction to which both participants contribute (Woods, 1996), the interview needed to be a dynamic event (Wilson, 1996). The researcher followed the questions but was open for changes of sequence and forms of questions (Kvale, 1996). She adopted non-verbal behaviour herself along with a positive tone of voice, as a way of encouraging the respondent. To ensure that the teachers' understanding was genuine it was necessary to be sensitive to the respondents understanding of the questions. To enhance the quality of the interview the researcher used conscious assurance by using measures that are derived from the work of the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1980). When applying these measures it was suggested that interaction was facilitated. The measures are summarised below:

*Empathy* was used to show the teachers that the researcher was willing to empathise with their expressed views. This might have helped the teachers to feel that their views were both understood and accepted and could allow them to express their personally held views more openly.

*Unconditional positive regard* was used to give the respondents a sense of comfort and security. The interviewer showed a sense of liking and interest in the teachers as individuals through the questioning (e.g. enquired about aspects related to the school, which were not included in the questionnaire). *Congruence* was used to ensure that the teachers experienced the interview dialogue as honest and genuine. This might have helped to motivate the teachers (Rogers, 1980).

The semi-structured interviews were carried out to discover teachers' beliefs and understanding, and to collect information about their practice.

A list of topics and particular questions were made. The list included questions made to crosscheck data from the questionnaire used in Study I (Appendix III). The questions were designed to ascertain teachers' beliefs about the nature of their own behaviour in the classroom and to seek information about how they believed their behaviour; beliefs and methods can affect pupils. Furthermore, the questions were designed to gather information about teachers' co-operation with parents and colleagues and in what way this may affect the classroom's life.

The information gathered from the interviews was meant:  
to give an opportunity to gain understanding of the main principles in teachers behaviour, beliefs and actions in the classroom  
to access accounts of bias in relation to the classroom observations  
to consider how teachers' behaviour and beliefs can affect pupils

Hardly any problems occurred during the interviews. A kind of empathetic attitude was created whilst they took place and they seemed to be carried out in a joint pursuit. Most teachers spoke freely; this was perceived by how things were said how questions were answered and by the relaxed atmosphere. However, in two interviews this was not the case. One teacher said she was almost going to cancel the visit and admitted she was very anxious. This was visible during the interview, as she sometimes seemed blocked-up and did not find answers to some of the questions. Another teacher claimed that the questions were complicated and this was also observable during the interview. Two questions made him irritable as he found them too difficult. These teachers' problems in expressing their real beliefs might influence the results. Several teachers expressed their pleasure at participating in the study and one asked: "How is my teaching, what do you really think of me as a teacher? I never get any feedback and I don't know how I am as a teacher".

The interviews were tape-recorded and it was noticeable that the majority of the teachers very soon settled easily to a conversation after having

answered the initial questions. However, three questions, proved to be complicated and needed to be explained to some of the teachers. (Q: How do you show understanding to the pupils? / Q: To which of your pupils' needs do you think you are most sensitive? [7.5.2 Empathetic Behaviour] /Q: In what way do you consider yourself to be an example to your pupils, e.g. by your attitude, strategies or responses? [7.5.3 Interaction in the Classroom]).

#### 7.4.3 Analysis

The results of the interviews with the twenty teachers in small and large schools provided detailed information about their beliefs, their views of their own actions and their understanding of their own behaviour. When the interviews were typed, the transcript was transformed into the computer file, to be read by 'Ethnograph'. This facilitated the mechanical task involved in the coding and sorting of segments of the data. It also made the analysis procedure and the breaking down of the text into analysis units or segments easier. Each segment provided various types of information according to the sets of concepts that were developed (Table, 7.1). The concepts were relevant to the research objectives and had been used in the previous studies (Study I and Study II). This made possible a comparison between the studies. The concepts were; *pupils' individual needs, teachers' empathetic behaviour, interaction, discipline, teachers' relationships with parents, and teachers' relationships with colleagues and teaching approaches.*

The concepts were analysed into subtypes and led to the formation of a coding system, which was useful for detecting rationale and patterns in the data. The coding system seeks to explain the concept phenomena and allows for the placing of the study in a larger context and description of it. The codes included both positive and negative codes (Table 7.1). Cohen and Manion (1981) maintain that concepts enable us to impose some sort of meaning on the world: through them reality is given sense, order and coherence. They are the means by which we are able to come

to terms with our experience. How we perceive the world, then is highly dependent on the repertoire of concepts we can command. The more we have, the more meaningful data we can pick up and the surer will be our perceptual (and cognitive) grasp of whatever is ‘out there’ (Cohen and Manion, 1981:10).

Table 7.1 provides insight into the most frequent concepts and codes that emerged from the transcript.

Table 7.1 Categories and Codes for Analysis of the Interview Transcript

Concepts	N	Codes (positive)	N	Codes (negative)
Special needs	1	Knowledge Acceptance Skills	1a	Ignorance Rejection Lack of skills
Empathetic behaviour	2	Sense of own behaviour Awareness, consciousness (understanding) Listening Use of voice Confident Encouraging	2a	Insensitive Fails to understand Distracted Insecure Distant
Interaction	3	Nature of teacher/pupil Interaction Facilitating relationships Skills necessary Teachers personality (values, beliefs, standards)	3a	Lack of interaction Distant Unskilful Vague about effects on pupils
Discipline	4	Discussions Negotiations Pupils' responsibility	4a	Lack of skills Discipline, Teachers' responsibility
Teachers' relationships with parents	5	Practice of links Use of parents knowledge	5a	Lack of contact Ignoring parents Knowledge
Teachers' relationships with colleagues	6	Practice of links Nature and quality Isolation	6a	Lack of contact Isolation
Teaching Approach	7	Methods Stimulation for learning Encouraging learning	7a	Not stimulating No methods for teaching

The data were analysed inductively by way of ethnographic content analysis from the conceptual codes (Table 7.1). Each segment was carefully analysed to make decisions about what might be identified as significant phenomena and what was worth taking note of.

For the purpose of the analysis of the interviews the following types of questions were asked: First, the question was asked if the letter of the text or the 'spirit' would be interpreted. This involves whether the interviews were to be analysed on a manifested level or the aim was to get at the latent meaning of the text. Second, there was a question of one correct interpretation of a text or if there is a legitimate plurality of interpretations. Kvale (1996) claims that if the principle of the latter is accepted, it becomes meaningless to pose strict requirements of interpreter consensus. "What then matters is to formulate explicitly the evidence and arguments that enters into an interpretation, so that the interpretation can be tested by other readers" (Kvale, 1996:211).

In order to present data in a systematic way, and to investigate factors producing differences in teachers' answers, the following classification was used:

- differences between small and large classes
- frequency of answers from teachers in small and large schools
- differences between gender
- differences in teachers' understanding and empathy

Patterns of action and understanding that unite and diverse the teachers are analysed and described. Quotations are taken from the data to illustrate and substantiate the text. The number of small and large schools in each case is shown in parenthesis. In each section below, teachers' responses are divided into categories and the results presented according to these categories. At the end of each section the key results are summarised.

## **7.5 Results**

### **7.5.1 Special Needs**

The teachers seemed to have three different ways of conceptualising 'special needs'. One understanding is that every child has special needs

but those children's needs vary; another is that there are specific types or categories of disabilities and the third was to connect special needs and provision. Only three teachers in the small schools (5ls, 3ss)<sup>31</sup> said that the concept special needs must be understood in broad terms and pointed out the importance to recognise that every child has special needs. Only five teachers (3ls, 2ss) gave a detailed explanation of the concept 'special needs' and connected pupils' special needs with provision. And one of them said that special needs are there:

*...when a child needs an individualised educational programme or some special arrangements because of it's learning (14).*

Most of the teachers seemed to think that pupils with special needs should attend ordinary schools. Twelve teachers (6ls, 6ss, 60%), equal numbers in each type of school, seemed to have thought this issue through. They maintained that all pupils should have the right to attend their neighbourhood school, have the company of other children and learn in an ordinary classroom as full participants.

Some ambivalence was noted among quite a few teachers regarding a placement for pupils with special needs. This uncertainty was found to be equal in both types of schools (2ls, 2ss).

This uncertainty seemed to be further confirmed by the number of teachers (6ls, 10ss), who said that before taking on the responsibility of teaching pupils with special needs, they had felt badly prepared to teach these pupils. However, they had taken on this task, but only two teachers in small schools (4ls, 2ss) recognised that the task was a challenge for all concerned.

Even a long teaching experience may not ensure teachers' confidence to meet the needs of all children (1ls, 2ss). One of the teachers in the small schools had taught for over twenty years, her class numbered eight

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<sup>31</sup> ls = large schools, ss = small schools

children, two of whom had speech problems and the third one behaviour problems. She seemed not to regard these three children as having special needs; her answer seems to imply children with more severe disabilities:

*I must admit that I feel very incompetent to teach children with special needs, I have not the appropriate training. When I think of it, it must be an extremely difficult task. This is something I have not really confronted. If I were to have a pupil with special needs in the class I would look for support (1).*

The same number of teachers (6ls, 6ss) in each type of schools claimed that their teaching took place within a broad and flexible curriculum, which is adapted to pupils' individual needs. When the teachers were asked further how they meet pupils' individual needs, the answers were vague. Half of the teachers in both types of schools (5ls, 5ss) did not have clear opinions on the issue, and all pupils' needs were not provided for. A teacher in a small school who taught fourteen children in a multi-grade class, claimed she found it hard to focus on individual needs and she did not provide age-related tasks:

*Of course it is always difficult to teach on an individual basis. I do provide all pupils with the same task, although different in age, but I don't make the same demands on the younger children (7).*

In a multi-age class of seven pupils, all the pupils are given the same tasks plus some extra activities when needed. The teacher's response revealed her vagueness about how she organises the teaching:

*I think I meet their needs by providing them with additional tasks, be they more demanding or less demanding. I try to do that. I make different demands on the troubled child in the class (4).*

Surprisingly, in spite of the small number pupils in the small schools, only two teachers in these schools said that they could give pupils all the attention they needed. The other teachers (8ss) in small schools seemed to to ave

*No, I don't [give pupils with special needs more attention] I try to give them all equal attention. Of course there are individuals in need of more help but I do not necessarily provide them with more attention (7).*

Even in a class of eight pupils there seemed to be complications:

*I would like to take care of all the pupils but one tends to think that the more able may help themselves. Therefore I would rather take care of those with difficulties first (4).*

In all, five teachers in large schools and four teachers in small schools said they provided differentiated tasks. In a class of fifteen, differentiation was missing and the teacher seemed to have problems:

*It is not possible to provide individual attention. I keep them all doing the same task but they get some additional task (20).*

Three teachers in the large schools seemed to find it demanding that pupils needs vary and this even created irritation. One of these three teachers drew up a bizarre picture, which was not recognised in the small schools. He seemed not to have a full understanding of pupils' individual differences or what condition would be to the greatest benefit for his class of fifteen pupils:

*I only give individual attention to those who are slow or lazy or have some difficulties. I put enormous emphasis on everyone working at the same task at the same time. This is my main criterion as I have stressed before; I don't have time to do anything else (20).*

Seven teachers, (5ls, 2ss) stressed that it was their experience that shared responsibility of two teachers of a class is essential, if they are to manage meeting all pupils' individual needs.

The teachers were asked how they assess pupils' individual needs. Ten teachers (5ls, 5ss) linked the question to learning achievement and said they applied task-related assessments in order to make decisions about the progress of pupils' learning:

*I apply assessment, which I have developed myself according to the objectives of the curriculum. In this way each pupils' situation is always known and defined. This makes it unnecessary to carry out exams. There are more teachers in the school who use this kind of assessment but not all (3).*

It is worth noting that only one teacher in the sample (ss) seemed to evaluate pupils' individual needs from a broader perspective and



explained that in addition to task related assessment she evaluates pupils' social skills:

*I also use observations to assess pupils' co-operative skills and how they take act in various situations. For this I use a certain scale (6).*

Five teachers (2ls, 3ss) said they assessed pupils' progress mainly by their own intuition. This does not seem to be influenced by class size as might be expected, as the number pupils in these five classes ranged from six up to twenty-two. In spite of this teacher's twenty years of teaching experience she expressed her lack of confidence in assessing pupils individual needs.

The results show similarities of teachers understanding, in both types of schools, of provisions for pupils with 'special educational needs'; almost all teachers agreed that pupils with special needs should attend ordinary school. There was uncertainty concerning provision for these pupils; teachers claimed that their teaching took place within a broad and flexible curriculum, but when asked further about the content of the curriculum their answers were vague. The same number teachers in both types of schools found it difficult to attend to pupil' individual needs, and similarly teachers applied task related assessments when evaluating pupils progress. More teachers in small schools had problems explaining the concept 'special needs'; only three teachers in small schools could explain the concept 'special educational needs' in broad terms and more teachers in small schools felt badly prepared to teach pupils with special educational needs. Only two teachers in small schools said they were able to give pupils the attention they needed. Long teaching experience did not seem to increase teachers understanding, and male teachers found this more difficult than did female teachers.

### 7.5.2 Empathetic Behaviour

Just over half of the teachers could explain their understanding of empathetic behaviour with ease. Half of the teachers (5ls, 5ss) said that

understanding pupils is their way of showing empathetic behaviour. However, their perception of the concept 'understanding' differed. One of them placed several meanings in the concept:

*I can show understanding in many ways, by listening, by a clap on the shoulder, by nodding, discussing, by telling the child that you do understand and by giving an answer that relates to what was said. The child has to sense that you really understand and listen (6).*

A female teacher with over twenty years of teaching experience expressed her understanding of empathetic behaviour:

*I try to put myself into their shoes. I try to sense what they think and I try to understand why s/he is thinking so. I try to understand why the pupils respond or behave in a certain way and what motivates their responses or reactions. I am always thinking about this, at home, on my way to school but of course mainly while I am with them (16).*

This teacher actually seems to consider ways to understand pupils' behaviour and responses. That was not always the case. As many as eight teachers (3ls, 5ss) seemed not to have thought much about their own way of showing empathetic behaviour. Their answers were vague: "I am not so sure, probably by a clap on the shoulder, by a smile or some positive response" (9). Two of these (1ls, 1ss) directly said that they could not describe their empathetic behaviour. A male teacher in a small school with under ten years of teaching experience said: "I cannot answer the question. It is too difficult" (3). Second, a female teacher with over ten years of teaching experience said: "I cannot describe it, I just try to respond" (15).

Almost three fourth, and equally many teachers (7ls, 7ss) in each type of school said that they were most sensitive to pupil's emotional needs. Five of these teachers talked about the "...need to understand the balance between pupils' educational and emotional needs" (16).

Response to pupils' social needs or recognition of the importance of doing so does not seem to depend on the size of school. In both types of

schools, teachers seldom (11s, 1ss) mentioned the importance of being responsive to pupils' social needs. A teacher in a small school seems to take the initiative to develop relationships herself, both between her and the children, as well as between the children themselves:

*When I get a new group of children, I intentionally try to consider their social and emotional needs. I also monitor their educational needs closely. I think I take good care of the children both emotionally and socially. This is of course the foundation of learning (6).*

This teacher seems to understand that pupils' needs interrelate. Yet, this was not always the case. A young teacher in a large school, with under ten years teaching experience, claimed that he is not sensitive to pupils social needs and seemed not to consider it as part of his responsibility to promote such interaction in the classroom. This can have its consequences as he declares himself:

*I am not sensitive for pupils' social needs or what happens outside the classroom, e.g. if they are not feeling well or if they are bullied. We may discuss such issues, but it has happened several times that someone has been bullied and I have not had any idea of what was going on (20).*

The results show that the teachers are not aware of what needs they are most sensitive to. They apparently, had not thought about the issue, as was confirmed by a male teacher with over twenty years teaching experience. He directly said: *"I have not really thought much about this"* (11). This lack of thinking also appeared when the teachers were asked how they take pupils' emotional state into account. Another male teacher, with over twenty years of teaching experience, simply said: *"I must admit I have never thought of it"* (13). On the other hand, a female teacher in a small school seems to integrate pupils' emotional state and learning:

*I immediately sense if one of the children is not feeling well or is dissatisfied and I try my best to understand what is wrong and work it out. A child does not work if it's not feeling well. The learning is based on their emotional state, which we have to take into account (10).*

Such consideration also seems to have an effect on the climate in the classroom. A female teacher in a large school seemed to have worked deliberately on pupils' relationships and the positive effects seem apparent:

*When the atmosphere is like it is here, when each child is indeed considered, and cared for, the pupils are relaxed and in such a good balance that our possibilities to take care of everyone are maximised (14).*

More than half of the teachers (6ls, 6ss), equal numbers in each type of schools, said that empathetic behaviour is based on both, their verbal and non-verbal conduct. Teachers' skills are needed, as illustrated by a female teacher in a small school:

*First of all I want to say that eye contact indicates listening. I try to make eye contact with pupils when they are talking to me, I answer, and I nod and repeat. With help of your body language you can show that you understand. You can also rephrase what is said. I do apply active listening by using these skills (6).*

A male teacher in a large school explained how he has to be aware of how children may read his body language:

*As I said earlier I need to be interested in what a child is saying. When we are discussing a certain topic I like to think that they see I am committed to them, that I want to listen. If I am not sure I can ask them to explain. Another thing about listening is that it must be seen. I have to have the ability to listen, and to take children's ideas into account. That is how I listen to children. I listen by showing them that what they say is important (19).*

Three teachers (2ls, 1ss), all with over twenty years of teaching experience, claimed that they had not thought about how they listen themselves. The question caused a real problem for one of them who said he had never thought of this unconscious process, while another confessed her wish to be more able to listen. In spite of her long teaching experience, she seemed to have problems in understanding the children:

*I don't know how to describe it. Sometimes when the children are talking I sense that there is something behind what is said. I am not sure I understand. Sometimes I wish I were better at understanding people (4).*

Teachers in both types of schools seemed to be aware that their voice could be of fundamental importance in their teaching. Thirteen teachers (7ls, 6ss) claimed that they try to keep a relaxed voice in order to create a tension-free atmosphere in the classroom. A teacher with over ten years of teaching experience said:

*I consciously use my voice and really try to talk quietly, as it creates relaxed atmosphere and calms pupils down (2).*

Other teachers use a different approach “*I do not hesitate to raise my voice when the class becomes too noisy*” (5). As many as six teachers argued they had problems with their voice. A female teacher in a large school who had taught over twenty years claimed: “*I do not know how to use my voice. It is damaged. Still, I put a lot of effort in talking quietly and I try not to raise my voice*” (17). A teacher in a small school said that her problems with her voice had changed:

*My voice has been a problem because of how rusty it was. But as things have been changing after I started using the story-line method and co-operative teaching, I really don't need to use the voice to keep control (6).*

Interestingly, this answer seems to indicate that there might be a relation between teachers' use of voice and the teaching approach applied.

Equally many teachers in both types of schools could explain their understanding of empathetic behaviour with ease. These teachers maintained that such behaviour is based on both verbal and non-verbal conduct; that their voice could be of great importance in their teaching, and that they regard pupils' state of mind as an important component for learning to occur. More teachers in small schools than in large schools have not given much thought to how they show empathetic behaviour. Surprisingly, there are teachers that have not considered to which of their pupils' needs they are most sensitive. This was more common among male teachers than female teachers. There are indications that certain teaching approaches may help teachers use their voice more effectively, to talk softly and silently, but still reach out to pupils.

### 7.5.3 Interaction in the Classroom

Most of the teachers in the large schools and half of the teachers in the small schools (8ls, 5ss) pointed out that they think it is essential to create a caring and warm atmosphere between teachers and pupils, based on mutual trust. For this to be possible the teachers need to be sincere, encouraging and loyal, but also make the necessary demands. A teacher in a small school describes this further:

*Everything matters really, but mutual trust is very important. I must be sincere and loyal but I also need to be determined and make for discipline. Then it is important to praise the children when appropriate and being positive and cheerful. They need information about their progress; they need individual attention (6).*

Almost the same number of teachers (5ls, 4ss) in the schools claimed that it is important to discuss teacher-pupil interaction. These discussions need to be both whole-class discussions and discussions with individuals. This method may provide the teacher with a deeper understanding of pupils' needs. A teacher in a small school has organised weekly discussions from where she obtains important information:

*We have a class meeting for 15-20 minutes every week. There we discuss our interaction and other issues. The pupils are also provided with an opportunity to talk to me alone. They raise many issues and I have obtained information, which I think I would not have been able to get without these meetings (3).*

In both types of schools, there were teachers (2ls, 3ss) who found it difficult to answer what is of importance in teacher-pupil interaction. In this regard, there appeared some gender-related differences. While a female teacher seemed to be unsure of herself, a male teacher expressed self-confidence. However, both seemed to be having difficulties. The female teacher asked: "Shouldn't it be my manners that matter in our interaction, that we do not dislike each other, I am not so sure?" (4). On the other hand, the male teacher seemed to lack empathy and in his view things seem to be clear-cut and simple:

*There are only two things that matter [in our interaction], the pupils have to respect the teacher and the teacher has to respect*

*the pupils. This should prevent the pupils from being scared and help them to relate to the teacher (20).*

This teacher seems to be avoiding an answer or lacking in his understanding. The teachers were asked about the way to build up trust between themselves and their pupils. The answers differed, but almost equal number of teachers (7ls, 6ss) in both types of schools emphasised the importance of teachers' interpersonal skills. Trust will not be achieved without an effort, and the teachers' way of thinking and his/her approach is influential. Again, the teachers emphasised the importance of listening to pupils, and showing them care. To build up mutual trust was also seen as a central part of learning, as described by a teacher in a small school:

*To build up trust, mutual trust, one needs to be able to associate with people, talk to them. The teacher has to know pupils' qualities and give positive reinforcement and must not be negative. This is a central part of learning (6).*

More teachers in small schools (2ls, 5ss) could not explain their way of establishing trust between themselves and their pupils. Two teachers in small schools stated directly that the question was too difficult.

In spite of long teaching experience, a female teacher in a small school was very ambivalent about how she establishes trust. She had problems:

*This is a difficult question. Being positive whatever the circumstances. [silence]. Please wait; there must be something more to say [silence]. What did I say, being positive and to know the children (4).*

A teacher in a small school explained how physical contact is a matter of course in a small community where everyone knows each other:

*The skills you need in interaction with pupils are being able to be sensitive and loving. This is the attitude here; everyone is somehow like that. It is very common that people embrace each other when they leave the school, both children and adults. People in Reykjavik would faint if we would embrace them in the shop or elsewhere (8).*

Again, the findings showed little difference between the two types of schools. When teachers were asked how they might be an example to

pupils, about half of the teachers in each type of schools (6ls, 5ss) were able to present their ideas. They presented a model that reflects teachers' respect for pupils; they needed to be organised, using good language and various strategies of interaction:

*The greatest skill any teacher can possess is to be able to think on his feet. This is intrinsic to the different modes of interaction. I don't want to present pupils with one way of solving problems (19).*

This same teacher gave an example of his ideas in practice:

*I have to accept pupils' values as well. Personally I think some art is not real art. I would not choose it, but I still have to show respect for pupils' choices. Not just accept, I have to be positive and reinforce it ...I want their knowledge to be based on understanding but not prejudice. I hope what I do and say about their art is based on some sort of understanding (19).*

This teacher seems to want to show real understanding and accept pupils' attitude and values, even when it differs from his own, and he wants to show his respect for pupils. In this way he conducts himself as an example to pupils.

Teachers (2ls, 3ss) in both types of schools seemed quite unaware of how their attitude and behaviour could affect the interaction in the classroom. They (2ls, 3ss) had problems telling in what way they think they constitute a role model for pupils. In spite of a long teaching experience, a female teacher seemed to have problems:

*It's not easy to say. I am not sure how to answer this question [she asked the researcher to stop the recording to give her time to think] ... This is something one does not think about but probably this is always on one's mind because one is always interacting with people. [long silence] ...I want them to trust me and I need to be consistent. I try not to push my beliefs on children (4).*

Eight teachers 'gave away' their own personalities when they answered the question about teachers serving as role models. A teacher in a small school said:

*I deliberately try to make a good example. I am a very optimistic person and I try to be positive and I believe it is shown in my teaching and interaction with pupils. I really am a positive person.*



*I try never to get upset. Naturally, this influences interaction on day to day basis (6).*

In this way, this teacher believed her personality, her values and behaviour made up a role model, which may influence pupils.

Teachers in small and large schools agree on the following: teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom needs to be discussed and teacher-pupil interaction depends on teachers' interpersonal skills, attitude and effort. Almost equally many teachers were able to present their ideas of how they might be an example to pupils. In both types of schools there were almost equal numbers of teachers who had problems explaining what is important in teacher-pupil interaction. More teachers in the large schools than in small schools think it is important to create an atmosphere in the classroom that is based on mutual trust and understanding. More teachers in the small schools could not explain how they create trust between themselves and pupils.

#### 7.5.4 Discipline in the Classroom

All the teachers in the large schools (10ls) and most of the teachers in the small schools (8ss) said that pupils' behaviour needs to be based on certain methods of discipline. However, the ideas behind these methods differed considerably. Some of the teachers seemed to have developed methods of discipline, based on discussions and negotiations between teachers and pupils. They claimed that pupils understood their responsibility, and that this was reflected in their behaviour. This view was more obvious in the large schools:

*Now they all behave well, but it has taken time. We have been their teachers for four years. First we started by talking about consideration and respect towards others and then step by step we discussed other issues regarding behaviour. A mutual discussion is always ongoing. From the beginning we deliberately taught them to interact. Now they take care of each other and they are really thoughtful. They give signals before things go wrong. Now they fully understand that discipline in the classroom depends on themselves (14).*

The effects of discussions and negotiations seem to have led to increased responsibility and consideration among pupils, which again are reflected in pupils' behaviour.

Another teacher in a large school presented an opposite approach, which seemed to be based on the teachers' premises, but not pupils needs or ideas. The answer seems to reflect insecurity:

*I personally think that if there are methods of discipline, pupils find that they are taken care of... When a teacher starts teaching in the autumn he has to be very assertive, he must almost keep a military discipline. They [the pupils] have to know who is the leader, and gradually one can loosen the cord but it must always be clear what the rules are and the teacher must maintain his respect. ...breaking the rules means you have to work in the playtime on Fridays or you have to stay in the corridor while the others are doing something pleasant. The following week the process starts again. Sometimes it is enough just to show them the yellow card. The names of the pupils getting the yellow card are written up. By now the red card is unnecessary (20).*

In this classroom, the interaction between the teacher and pupils is strict. The teacher seemed to have imposed the methods of discipline and the pupils seemed to be passive in this process. Pupils' behaviour was measured and the result was made visible for all. Breaking rules led to a punishment. Pupils were separated from the class and had to leave the classroom or work when others were playing. In this way, the teacher-pupil interaction seems to cause a tension instead of balance and may prevent the necessary condition for learning.

Although, pupils have the opportunity to discuss methods of discipline, it does not ensure that they may have an influence on the situation. In spite of the small number pupils ( $n = 10$ ) in one of the small schools the interaction was not reciprocal. Pupils' ideas seemed not to be considered because the teachers already predetermined the rules. The rules seemed to be fixed and the pupils had to adapt to them.

*This is difficult to explain. [how she maintains discipline]. I try to convince them to follow certain rules. As you saw today, the rules are few but firm. First they found this unfair because the rules are*

*fixed. This made the children intolerant. We continue to discuss the rules and in the end they accepted (10).*

Another teacher in a small school explained the connection between the method of discipline and teaching. She argued that discipline is sustained by established and organised seating as well as by whole class teaching and individualistic teaching. She asserted that group work was disruptive and not fitting to her ideas of a disciplined classroom, but still she sounded uncertain about her methods and ideas:

*I want to keep to a firm discipline, this I probably maintained through a certain form of teaching... I try to apply certain rules.... This is related to how they [the pupils] sit. I find it helpful to keep order. They all have their own seats... If they move, they know that I tell them to go to their seats again... It is always more difficult to keep to a firm discipline if they are doing group work because then they need to search for information and move around. The pupils need to be very disciplined to do group work (7).*

This teacher seemed not to have the confidence or courage to change her way of teaching for fear of losing control. Keeping everything under control seems to give her confidence. Therefore she does not apply teaching methods that might be more suitable for her pupils. The strict order seems to prevent the pupils from participating on various activities.

In two of the small schools, the teachers argued that there were no formal written rules regarding pupils' behaviour. One of these teachers maintained that she does not want to impose direct rules of discipline. Rather, the children have to recognise what is the nature of interaction between people. The teacher seems to deliberately talk to the pupils about self-discipline. In this class the smallness seems to be of help:

*We have no written rules, but we know that being good to each other is a rule number one.... I do emphasise self-discipline. I emphasise that each pupil should do his or her best. Being cheerful is so important, and polite and to know when to apologise. We discuss the importance of forgiveness and of being considerate, we discuss this a lot (1).*

Clearly, this teacher manages to build up trust and there were obvious rules in his classroom. This is so, despite the fact that the teacher

claimed that rules were unnecessary. One of the teachers in the sample spoke of the unfair discipline in her school. However, she kept to these rules in spite of their possible unfortunate consequences. A boy in the class was restless and had difficulties in concentrating on his work, because his sense of justice had been hurt. Fighting in the school was forbidden but a fight broke out during recess and everyone was punished. The teachers explained that this was because there were rules for everyone to follow. The boy simply refused to accept these rules, which in turn resulted in a conflict. The teacher seemed not to have the capability to solve openly the part of the problem, which was relevant to her own class. The importance of discussing the events of the day was not recognised, not even on an individual basis, even though the boy openly showed his hostile feelings.

Almost all teachers in both types of schools regard it as necessary to keep to certain methods of discipline. Teachers, who had based their methods of discipline on discussions and negotiations, seemed to appeal to pupils' sense of responsibility and respect for others. In this kind of environment, pupils seem to recognise the nature of interaction. On the other hand, strict rules, imposed by the teacher may cause tension in the classroom, and cause lack of concentration and maintain passive behaviour among pupils. This was found to be more frequent in large schools than in small schools. These two different methods of creating discipline in the classroom may have different effects on pupils' learning.

#### **7.5.5 Relationships with Parents**

More teachers in the large schools compared to teachers in small schools (8ls, 2ss) maintained they had developed enduring links with parents to help everyone concerned to establish regular and formal co-operation. This co-operation was threefold, i.e.: individual meetings with parents; parents' meetings where teaching plans and material was introduced and lastly by phone and/or diaries. The purpose of this co-operation is illustrated in the following example:

*My contact with parents takes several forms. I emphasise a positive attitude between us as this affects the children, the parents and myself. The parents have to feel that they are welcome to the school and that we give the children all the attention they need. This refers to all our contacts... I think I only talk to parents on a positive line (16).*

In the small schools, the nature of teachers' co-operation with parents seemed to be based on different premises, the closeness between people within the small community being a determining factor (8ss). Some of these teachers (4ss) claimed that it is unnecessary to establish formal co-operation. A comment from a female teacher in a small school shows that teacher-pupil relationship is very open, and that she does not even defend her private life:

*You can talk to the parents at all times, while you are teaching, in the afternoon or in the evening, ...the possibilities are considerable when you work and live in this small community where you know all the parents and some of them very well (6).*

Other teachers (3ss) were in doubt of the advantages of this kind of closeness. In the large schools such closeness was hardly mentioned.

In the small schools most of the teachers (8ss) call parents only when things go wrong, the situation has been reversed: *"I phone [parents] when difficulties arise" or "I sometimes phone [parents] when the homework is not done"*. Only one teacher in the small schools said that she initiated contacts with parents when everything was going well.

About one third of the teachers (4ls, 3ss), said parents visit the class. A female teacher in a small school, who was teaching her second year in a small school, said she noticed that people were reluctant to make contact when she first started work at the school. She explained how she introduced herself to parents and invited them to visit the class:

*At first, people were very reluctant, and I received no information of importance for my teaching from them. The diary book helped; at first they gave practical information, but then they started to give more thorough information, e.g. about the pupils' emotions and well-being. Now I have a stable contact with parents and*

*some grandparents. And now I often drop by for a cup of coffee (10).*

This teacher in a small school seemed to realise that it was up to her to establish contact with parents. She managed to break the ice and adapt to the community. However, teachers in the small schools seemed not to manage to work with parents in a constructive way, and sometimes the line of communication seemed to be blocked.

Half of the teachers (5ss) in the small schools maintained that it is difficult to establish formal contact with parents, while most teachers' (8ls) in the large schools did not indicate any such problems. It appeared from one teacher's answer that she rarely initiates formal contact with parents:

*Parents seldom come to the school, once a year I invite them for an interview and, in addition, I introduce the plan, material and the curriculum at another meeting. Otherwise, there is no intentional co-operation with parents (1).*

The smallness of a community may serve to make members hesitant about social contacts and help create obstacles between parents and teachers, which again could be detrimental to the kind of co-operation necessary. A teacher in a small school explained:

*It is obvious that a boy in the class has difficulties. I assume there are difficulties at home, but I have not managed to obtain any information. The parents do not react to my requests. In this small community you meet parents everywhere, in the swimming pool, at meetings etc. This makes the contact quite a sensitive affair (3).*

This same teacher seemed to realise that some children might suffer from the lack of contact between parents and the teacher, but he did not feel capable of facilitating communication:

*I do not get the information I need; there are problems at home and some tension between the children and the parents. I think these parents do not realise that there is a problem. It is just useless to talk to some parents (3).*

This example illustrates a dilemma and the teacher seems to be unable to break the barriers. He seemed to be aware of the lack of contact, but the

parents simply did not want to discuss family matters. Yet, the teacher feels:

*...the pupils can't hide anything; you can always sense what they feel, they always express it in one way or another, even when they don't want to. Therefore the lack of contact is a real problem (3).*

One of the teachers in the small schools openly admitted that he did not want the contact with parents to be formal because of the circumstances. He wanted to keep it informal:

*In this small community, I must really say, I don't bother to establish formal contact with parents. I see them in the shop every day, we can talk where we meet in the street, these are the characteristics of a small community. We have one parents' meeting in the autumn, which is fine, and we bring the school year to an excellent conclusion. We really meet a lot. I don't even bother to answer all those questions from the Ministry of Education about parents; it is not worth the trouble (8).*

There seems to be more to this answer than the wish to remain informal as the teacher maintained that he does not bother to fulfil his duty towards the authorities.

In a large school the teacher in question apparently was not familiar with his obligations, he saw teaching as his only duty:

*I am not interested in co-operation with parents. It is too time consuming and it is not my duty. My duty is to teach but not to take care of the children's social or emotional state, that's the parents' duty (20).*

Compared with teachers in large schools, few teachers (7ls, 4ss) in small schools consciously seek information about the pupils from parents, and two teachers in these schools admitted they do not initiate contact with parents at all in order to gain information about pupils. Three of these teachers talked about the difficulties in obtaining information from parents. The reasons for these difficulties remain somewhat unclear.

However, the contact in the small schools was not always thwarted. In the same school the relationship can be both close and distant. This seems to vary from one individual to another:

*Here, the contact depends on the parents' need; some only provide little information, while others keep in contact every day. They might phone in the morning to tell that their child had a bad sleep, and therefore she will not be working hard. Most of the parents are very close to us and we seek information on purpose (5).*

Seeking information from parents about their children in an organised way, is a process more frequently recognised in the large schools (7ls, 4ss). This information had to do with pupils' emotional and social state rather than their learning. The following examples from teachers in large schools exemplify this:

*I seek information from parents by standardised questions. These I always use throughout the school year. They are about the pupils' well being, their social situation and about homework (14).*

*I would say that most of the information I get back from parents is concerned with how they think their children feel in the school or in my class, more than about the learning itself. The feedback I get is mostly about their feelings; it might also have to do with specific problems or even special skills (19).*

Information of this kind seems to be gathered in order to improve pupils learning abilities. Although most teachers in the large schools claimed they seek information from parents on purpose, their answers took different directions when they were asked how they apply parents' information in their teaching. On the whole the answers were vague, with only two teachers in large schools explaining this issue:

*I write down all information and parents wishes, which I consider important. In my teaching I do keep this in mind and I think I do it in a structured way (14).*

In the small schools, only three teachers said they apply information from parents to their teaching. The informality in small schools came through and seemed to show that the teacher quoted below is not consciously working in accordance to an organised plan:

*I have no idea how I get information about the children; we are so lucky, the children are so wonderful, probably old fashioned. If one of them is not well, we just call the mother or we can walk to the home if needed. To be honest, there are no problems here and we are not trying to create them (8).*



This teacher was not answering the question about his gathering of information from parents or his own use of such information. He gave the impression of having totally disregarded the issue.

Organised co-operation with parents was almost only found in the large schools. In the small schools, the closeness within the community seemed to have a determining effect on teacher-parent relationship. This often personal and close contact may make it difficult for teachers to initiate formal contact with parents. The teachers seemed not to have found or know methods to break these barriers, in order to establish formal co-operation between the school and parents. This may not be the only reason for this lack of contact. Almost all teachers in small schools only contact parents when things go wrong, and some teachers in both types of schools directly avoid all contact with parents. This problem, which was more frequent among male teachers, may prevent teachers from obtaining important information from parents about their children.

#### 7.5.6 Teachers' Co-operation

The setting of co-operation in the large schools was mainly twofold: meetings of a group of teachers teaching pupils of the same age, and general staff meetings. In the small schools the setting was more variegated.

Organised meetings for all staff were held on a regular basis in both types of schools but such meetings were less common in the small schools (9ls, 6ss). The number of these meetings and their planning varied. In the large schools weekly meetings were almost the rule (6ls).

The most common form of co-operation in the large schools was a meeting of teachers (8ls), who teach pupils of the same age. As a matter of course, teachers in small schools cannot hold this type of meetings. Instead, some of the small schools had adopted regular meetings for teachers teaching either younger or older pupils.

Over half of the teachers (6ss) in small schools gave the impression that their meetings were more in the form of a chat; they meet every day and the group of teachers is small. However, these meetings could be on a regular basis and co-operation seemed to be progressing in this small school:

*We meet every week, but it is more of a chat. We talk about the passing week and what is ahead. Sometimes we organise things but there is hardly any direct co-operation between us. However, we have been discussing a change and we want to build up co-operation by starting to agree on objectives for the whole school. We are also interested in a school developmental project to improve language education. This is all at the starting point (1).*

In one large school and three small schools (1ls, 3ss) there seemed to be very little co-operation among the teachers.

*There are few things we need to discuss. Co-operation because of the children's learning is very rare. I am the only teacher teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade and there is no one to share ideas with. I sometimes contact the teacher who had me as a pupil some years ago (9).*

It seemed likely that this teacher has chosen to work in isolation and this has been accepted within the school. In spite of her obvious isolation she did not regard herself as professionally isolated.

A teacher in a large school described how he had abandoned all co-operation:

*I have my own ideas about how to teach. It is quite firm. The teacher teaching the same age is not formally qualified, this is her first year teaching so organisational aspects have been my responsibility. She is learning. We discuss when it is needed, but not weekly as our hours do not mesh... She is not formally qualified and I just need to rely on myself (20).*

This teacher seemed to have problems, he lacked time for co-operation and in addition, he did not accept his unqualified colleague.

More teachers in small schools have some kind of direct co-operation with other schools than do teachers in the large schools (2ls, 8ss). In three of the small schools this was in the form of an organised school

developmental project. The positive influence of participating in such a project can be deduced from the teachers' answers:

*Now, you dare to talk about teaching. Previously, we have not done that. Before we talked about the pupils, but not how we taught. This has really changed; e.g. now we have the opportunity to discuss with the other teachers how we teach. We can also talk about ourselves as teachers (6).*

A teacher in a large school also experienced the positive aspects of joining in a school developmental project. He explained some of the effects he had noticed:

*Through the project there is a lot of teamwork and a shared experience. We have had teachers come here to visit the school because they want to see what we have achieved. It is obviously because people think something interesting is happening and they want to know. Then it becomes like a spiral, really, that is what is so good about it, which is what all teachers probably need, it is to share things with other teachers. Then you get a positive feedback (19).*

In addition the teachers had managed to build up their co-operation and this seems to have been a forward stride:

*There are two types of co-operation, which might be both formal and informal. There is also this initiative, the schools development-project, of the last two years, which has been designed to increase the quality of co-operation. I am not necessarily convinced the co-operation here has always led to better quality of work, but it has at least made us think about what priorities we want and how best to achieve them. There is a high level of co-operation in this school (19).*

Being able to discuss professional matters seems to be stimulating and has not only brought about changes in teaching, teachers' attitude and thinking seems to be changing.

The teachers seemed also to be encouraged to co-operate with other schools. The purpose seemed to be that of gathering ideas and engaging in discussions. This co-operation was stimulating but informal. It looked as it was neither intentional or something to be utilised.

Bearing in mind the distances between small schools, it was noteworthy that very few teachers (1ls, 2ss) claimed they were professionally isolated. There seemed to be several ways to prevent isolation. A teacher in a large school out in the country explained how stimulating the visits of other teachers to the school had been. He seemed to realise the danger of isolation and also finds his way to prevent isolation:

*No, no I don't, [feel isolated]. I am very lucky as I get much feedback professionally, and we get a lot of people coming here all the time. I find it very stimulating, teachers visiting us who ask "why are you doing that, why are you doing this". I find that this keeps me thinking. I spend a lot of time reading and thinking about my job. Isolation is the biggest enemy of many teachers (19).*

Organised meetings are held in most of the large schools, but this is not the case in the small schools. Meetings take place in the small schools, but they are more in the form of a chat. The reason for this seems to be that many teachers in small schools do not find it necessary to have formal meetings because the staff is together all day. There were also teachers in small schools that deliberately avoid all meetings with colleagues. However, there were teachers in small schools that have been participating in developmental projects along with other schools, which they maintained had been a constructive influence within their school, because of the close co-operation between staff.

#### 7.5.7 Teaching Approaches

Overall, teachers' description of how they stimulate pupils' learning reflects a similar pattern. Three-fourth of the teachers (9ls, 6ss) said that they find it essential to introduce new material and awaken pupils' interest by diverse presentations for the whole class.

Other teachers seemed to be more progressive and this way of stimulating pupils was not followed by all the teachers. A teacher in a small school, first explained how she motivates pupils on individual bases and then by differentiation. In addition, she maintained that pupils'

involvement in decision making was a part of their learning. She continued:

*...discussions in groups about what is ahead, sometimes a video, pictures etc..... Traditional methods are less attractive both for me as a teacher and for the pupils because they are not as stimulating ad co-opertive learning and topic work. I use them as little as possible and I never use presentation for the whole class at the same time (6).*

A teacher in a large school described in detail what he thought stimulates pupils learning. He stressed that the content of material is of fundamental importance. It has to be based on individual needs, he emphasised the importance of selecting the right projects and the right tasks and the directing of situations. He extended his answer by giving an example of his approach:

*If I am teaching a class of teenagers and I tell them to work with GN, [material far below their age] I can not expect their interest. The material has to appeal to their experience, to their feelings and fit the children's interest, as I know them, their interests and skills. It has to relate to social situations, for everyone in the group. I must ask myself if the class can cope with a whole class project, or if the project is aimed at small groups, pairs, etc. The teaching material has to be based on my knowledge of the individual pupil (19).*

Five teachers (11s, 4ss) could not answer questions about stimulating pupils' learning. Their answers were unclear and it seems if as the issue had not been reflected upon. The two quotations below from teachers in small schools illustrate this confusion:

*[A long silence] If I am teaching something special I try do it in a way that motivates them, somehow, I am not sure how. It must depend on what I am teaching (4).*

*[Silence] Yes, usually I try to find something that applies to them [silence]. Often I try to find something that can be advantageous for them, especially if they don't see the reason for what they are doing (7).*

It is worth noting that only four teachers in small schools said that they decide on their teaching approaches on the basis of multi-grade teaching. These teachers claimed that their teaching was based on various group

activities, which they argued are effective for learning as well as for the promotion of good interaction in the classroom. One teacher maintained that the 'story line approach' is very suitable in mixed age groups because it does not rest on the use of certain books and is very well suitable in groups at the same time as it may fit individual needs. Some teachers (4ls, 4ss) said that co-operative learning is practised in their classes. A teacher in a small school said:

*Interaction in the classroom has improved greatly since I started using co-operative learning and topic-work (6).*

It is worth noting that the large class size in a large school did not prevent three of the teachers from bringing their classes together in collaborative work. In this way, the teacher interviewed claimed that the variety of groups might be increased which he claimed had improved social interaction in the class. The two classrooms are side by side which facilitates the arrangement. In one of these classes there was a pupil with severe disabilities and in the other class there had been discipline problems. Further, the teacher said that they often apply traditional teaching methods like, e.g. individualistic work, but in addition:

*...we apply several kinds of group activities and topic work. These group activities are best suited for language teaching and in maths and sciences, because of the experiments in these subjects. We are three teachers with two big classes organising the work together. It gives more opportunities for different children to mix and to get to know one another better. This we think has influenced their understanding and behaviour greatly (14).*

Teachers' knowledge about teaching approaches and individual needs is illustrated by a teacher in a large school:

*My subject is like any subject really, to be effective; it demands a range of teaching styles and balance. Some situations need to be teacher dominated and there might be other situations where pupils might be in charge. I might use small group work, individual work, a balance in teaching styles or in some tasks, other sorts of settings. They need activities, which really test their creative thinking and skills. Everyone in the group will have a role to play. Will it work? It demands variation in methods but at the same time it has to be true to the subject (19).*

In contrast to this answer, another teacher in a large school seemed not to think about consequences as well as his instructional means. He said:

*I have no idea how I choose my teaching methods, it just happens. I don't deliberately choose any special method; I can just tell you I don't use methods intentionally. This is just like when I take my instrument, I improvise (13).*

More teachers (4ls, 9ss) in small schools use individualistic teaching as the main teaching method. Pupils work alone while the teacher attends to each individual pupil. This teaching seems to be guided by teaching material like textbooks and workbooks as almost half of the teachers (4ls, 5ss) said was the case. One of those teachers' descriptions cast light on how satisfied he is with this way of arranging his teaching. The pupils can even control the learning process themselves. He maintained that nothing but individual teaching was appropriate in the multi-grade classroom:

*Of course the textbooks influences a great deal [the choice of teaching methods]. The books available are structured, especially in Icelandic and if they [pupils] can read, they can read the descriptions themselves. The groups are of mixed ages here and therefore it is very difficult to organise a specific system and teach everyone according to such a system (8).*

A number of teachers (5ls, 3ss) directly said that they use the teaching methods that suit themselves, they are familiar with, is convenient and they have used for years.

Only under half of the teachers (4ls, 4ss) maintained that their teaching arrangements are planned according to individual needs. In contrast to this, a teacher in a small school provides a good example:

*No, they are not all given the same assignments at a time because no one is alike anyone else, they all have different abilities and skills and their cognitive development is at different stage. They all learn in different ways. The pupils are all working on different tasks and using different materials (6).*

In contrast to this, just as many teachers (4ls, 4ss) said that they provide all pupils with the same tasks at the same time. Six of these teachers said

pupils are provided with additional tasks now and then. A teacher in a large school expressed his view:

*I think that I get the best overview of pupils' progress if they are all working on the same task at a time. It varies how long it takes to carry out a task; therefore I sometimes give them additional tasks. Unfortunately, I don't have time to prepare such tasks for individuals. I also think that it would be unbelievably hard to do so. Yes, it is unbelievably hard (20).*

Not all the teachers were satisfied with not being able to apply differentiated tasks. A teacher in a large school said that in her class of twenty-five pupils the children definitely needed differentiation but this was not possible, the pupils were too many:

*Unfortunately, it has to be like this [all the children are provided with the same tasks] because how many they are. I would never have time to organise the teaching according to different abilities. I wish it was possible. There is some basic knowledge that all of them need to have and since they sometimes can choose different tasks. I also provide additional task for the more able pupils and a special teacher is here several hours a week. I try to meet their needs, but this is certainly a difficult class with a wide range of difficulties, and therefore adequate instruction just is not possible (17).*

This teacher did not manage to differentiate the learning, but in another large school, differentiation was applied through group activities and seemed to be a part of the daily arrangement and practice.

In both types of schools, there were teachers that seemed to plan their teaching very carefully and take pupils' individual needs into account when choosing teaching methods. However, equally many teachers in both types of schools do not plan their teaching according to individual needs, rather they provide all pupils with the same tasks at the same time. There were teachers in both types of schools that seemed to have problems, even big problems with their teaching, but this was insignificantly more frequent in the small schools. However, this contrast between teachers appeared to be significant and unrelated to class size. Surprisingly few teachers in small schools organise their teaching with the fact in mind that they are teaching in a multi-grade



classroom. The main teaching method in small schools was individualistic teaching, which involves teacher-pupil interaction on an individual basis. Pupils' work alone while the teacher attends to individuals.

## **7.6 Discussion**

The aim of this study was to gather information about teachers' understanding of pupils' individual needs and understanding of their own interaction with the pupils in the classroom. In order to achieve this objective the study was designed to provide information about how teachers think their own verbal and non-verbal behaviour as well as choice of methods may affect pupils, not least pupils with special needs. Furthermore, the purpose was to gain information about teachers' links with parents and colleagues and how the nature of such relationships might affect the work in the classroom. Interviews were carried out with teachers in both small and large schools to make it possible to compare their understanding and beliefs.

The theory of the study made five predictions: a) in order to respond to pupils' individual needs, teachers need to understand these needs, discover them, gather information and provide for such needs in the curriculum, b) pupils with special needs may need more individual attention and teaching approaches that require extensive interaction with teachers and peers, c) a low number of pupils in a class should enable teachers to meet pupils' individual needs and enhance their participation in the class, d) teacher-pupil interaction plays a vital part in pupils' learning, e) the quality of this interaction may facilitate learning generally and especially the learning of pupils with special needs.

A difference was not found to exist between teachers in small and large schools. Neither was there a difference depending on the number of pupils in a class. However, a substantial difference was noted between teachers with regard to their understanding and beliefs and in this respect

some difference was detected, depending on teachers' teaching experience and gender. A long teaching experience did not seem to be of benefit and more female teachers were able to express their understanding of their behaviour and working routines than male teachers.

Most of the teachers in small and large schools were able to describe their understanding of special needs. They also seemed to accept the idea of having children with special needs in their classes. Nevertheless, in many instances teachers' practice seemed to be in contrast with their beliefs. About half of the teachers seemed unable to adjust their teaching to pupils' individual needs and seven teachers' answers indicated that they had considerable problems in meeting such needs. They were also unable to describe how they stimulate pupils' learning, or provide them with differentiated tasks suitable to their needs. These teachers said they provide pupils with the same task at the same time in spite of small multi-grade classes. A lack of contact between teachers in small schools and parents was noted, as well as a lack of communication and contact between colleagues within small schools.

Half of the teachers (5ls, 5ss) had difficulties in clarifying their understanding of 'empathetic behaviour' or how they might be an example to pupils. However, many teachers said they found it essential to create a caring and warm atmosphere in the classroom and said they were basically responsive to pupils' emotional needs.

The teachers were not preoccupied by labelling pupils in categories of disabilities, but this activity has been seen as influential in causing learning difficulties (Widlake, 1984; Ainscow and Muncey 1987). Three different ways of conceptualising special needs emerged from the data. One understanding was that every child has special needs but those children's needs vary; another was that there are specific types or categories of disabilities and the third was to connect special needs and provision. Five teachers seemed to consider pupils' needs according to

what can be done or provided, which is in accordance to the elements of Dearden's analysis of needs (Norwich, 1990:131). These teachers described children's strengths, weaknesses and circumstances of learning; goals which are relevant for the child in view of this description; and optimal means for achieving these goals. This understanding of the concept, special needs, seems to reflect that the teachers are focusing their attention on the child's current position and circumstances. This perspective was also found in other answers.

Over half of the teachers (6ls, 6ss), equally many in each type of school, seemed to be influenced by the movement, rooted in UNESCO's ideas about 'Education for All', which emphasises that all children should be educated in ordinary schools (UNESCO, 1989). They maintained that all pupils should have the right to attend their neighbourhood school, have the company of other children and learn in an ordinary classroom as full participants. Most of the teachers (6ls, 10ss) maintained that having pupils with special needs in the class was a challenge, which they had confronted. Also, twelve teachers claimed that their teaching takes place within a broad and flexible curriculum, which is adapted to pupils' individual needs. Not all teachers (2ls, 2ss) accepted the idea of having all children with special needs in the school. The reason for this seemed to be that they had not obtained training in special education and therefore felt badly prepared to provide for all pupils' needs.

When asked further, it appeared that half of the participants (5ls, 5ss) did not have a clear idea about how they provided for pupils' individual needs and these teachers' answers were vague. Of those, seven teachers (3ls, 4ss) seemed to have severe problems with meeting pupils needs, in spite of the low number of pupils in class. In some cases these teachers had a long teaching experience. In an extensive study of small schools, Galton (1990:73) found an apparent lack of planning in the organisation of the curriculum in small schools. This seems to be coherent with the results of this study, but here it applies to both small and large schools.

More teachers (4ls, 9ss) in small schools use individualistic teaching where pupils work alone while the teacher attends to each individual.

Ambiguities were also demonstrated concerning how pupils' progress is evaluated. One forth of the teachers said they assess pupils' progress mainly by their own intuition. Three teachers in the sample (3ls, 1ss) seemed to evaluate pupils' individual needs from a broad perspective; in addition to task related assessment they evaluated pupils' social skills. This poor situation of practice contrasts with teachers' own statements about the right of education for all, as well as it is against several official declarations of the Right of the Child (UNESCO, 1989; 1990; 1994 and 1996).

On the whole, the teachers maintained that pupils' behaviour in the classroom should be based on certain methods of discipline based on discussions and negotiations between teachers and pupils. However, there were examples of teachers (1ls, 2ss) who used methods of discipline that seemed to be imposed by the teacher while pupils seemed to be passive. Such strict order seems to prevent pupils from participating in various activities and limit teacher/pupil interaction in the classroom.

Differentiation was rare and eight teachers (4ls, 4ss) said that they provide all pupils with the same tasks at the same time. It was notable that only four teachers in the small schools claimed that they organise the teaching according to the multi-grade classes. An example was found of a teacher who claimed that he did not have an idea how he chooses the methods of teaching. One fourth of the teachers (1ls, 4ss) could not explain how they stimulate pupils' learning and it appeared that this issue had not been reflected upon. Differentiation is a process, which involves analysing each pupil's needs, his or her experience, knowledge, understanding, attitude and skills, and finding the most effective means of meeting these needs (Weston, 1992:6, Hall, 1992:20). A teaching practice based on such approaches may impede the negative effects of

labelling children according to abilities and hinder competition and comparison of pupils. Although differentiation is claimed to be the key to improved teaching and learning for all children and the prerequisite for pupils to approach a task on their own premises (Peter, 1992; Nordahl and Overland, 1992), only five teachers in the large schools and four teachers in the small schools said this was the approach they used. Overland (1992) has shown that if teachers are to meet all pupils' individual needs differentiation should be applied for all pupils. More teachers in the large schools compared to teachers in small schools (8ls, 2ss) maintained they had developed enduring links with parents to help everyone concerned to establish regular and formal co-operation. Giangreco, Cloninger and Iverson (1998) argue that families may provide key information that may have educational implications, such as the nature of pupils' interests, motivation, habits, fears, routines, needs and health. Therefore, by listening to parents, teachers may gain more complete understanding of the pupil's life outside school. Compared with teachers in large schools, few teachers (7ls, 4ss) in small schools consciously seek information about pupils from parents, and two teachers in these schools admitted they do not initiate contact with parents at all in order to gain information about pupils.

Half of the teachers (5ss) in the small schools maintained that it is difficult to establish formal contact with parents, while the teachers in the large schools did not indicate any such problems. In this context, the small community seemed to be a determining factor. Because of the closeness of the community, teachers claimed that it was unnecessary to establish formal co-operation, while this was hardly mentioned in the large schools. It also appeared that there were teachers who claimed they were not interested in co-operation with parents at all, mostly because of how time consuming it was. In the small schools teachers' line of communication with parents often seemed to be blocked. Parents were mainly contacted when things went wrong.

Other outcomes of the study also show this informal way of work in the small schools. Over half of the teachers (6ss) in the small schools said that their meetings within the school were informal and more in the form of a chat and three teachers declared that they had abandoned all co-operation. On the other hand, teachers' co-operation in the large schools was formal.

When the teachers were asked about their understanding of empathetic behaviour, many said that it is based on both, verbal and non-verbal conduct and skills to interact. However, only half of the teachers (5ls, 5ss), could clearly explain the concept. These ten teachers explained empathetic behaviour as a way of understanding pupils, which in the main involved; listening to verbal and non-verbal communication, a clap on a shoulder, eye contact or nodding, reflection on what the children are really thinking and feeling, putting oneself in the speaker's place in order to understand meaning and feelings behind what is said and by giving an answer that relates to what was said, or by repeating or rephrasing. These teachers seemed to have considered empathetic ways of understanding pupils' behaviour and responses.

A long teaching experience did not seem to help teachers to express their understanding and empathetic behaviour. Three teachers, all with over twenty years of teaching experience, claimed that they had not thought about how they listen to pupils. This may be linked to Rogers (1980) belief, who maintained that too little consideration has been given to the aspect of interpersonal relations called "empathetic", which he maintained was one of the prerequisites for real learning.

The findings of Cooper and McIntyre (1996) indicate that teachers tend to relate to the affective realm, rather than the cognitive. The authors found that factors connected with pupils' moods, attitudes and interests are the most prominent kinds of circumstantial factors, to which teachers attend (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996). This is in line with the interview

findings. The majority of the teachers (7ls, 7ss) said they were most sensitive to pupil's emotional needs, rather than their educational needs (1ls, 2ss). Being sensitive to pupils' emotional needs was explained, as being sensitive to how pupils are feeling. It is worth noting that just over half of the teachers seemed not to have thought about to which of pupils' needs they were most sensitive and only three teachers (1ls, 1ss) mentioned the importance of being responsive to pupils' social needs.

Cooper and McIntyre (1996) also found that teachers represented a need to create an atmosphere in the classroom that considered pupils' feelings or orientation. This was found to motivate pupils to engage actively in the learning process and to co-operate with others. Many teachers (8ls, 5ss) in this study pointed out that they think it is essential to create a caring and warm atmosphere between teachers and pupils, based on mutual trust. For this to be possible they said, teachers need to be sincere, encouraging and loyal, but also make the necessary demands. About half of the teachers said that a climate of trust is fostered by discussions, physical closeness and by showing individual children interest. One third of the teachers could not explain their way of establishing trust between themselves and the pupils. They found it difficult to answer questions about such unconscious processes. A long teaching experience did not make it easier for the teachers to respond to the question.

In this connection, many teachers (7ls, 6ss) seemed to be aware that their voice could be of fundamental importance. It was of interest that one teacher who had changed her teaching methods, said she had gained her voice as a result of this change. The change involved moving from whole class teaching to co-operative learning and topic work. It may be said that this is an expected consequence of using co-operative learning because the teachers' role is different from direct teaching procedures such as lecturing. In co-operative learning, when certain preconditions are set by the teacher, the groups themselves are meant to focus attention on the material to be learned, while the teacher' role is more to clarify,

monitor, review, answer questions, and intervene when it is necessary (Johnson and Johnson, 1994).

When the teachers were asked how they might be an example to pupils, only just over half of the them (61s, 5ss) presented their ideas. These teachers saw several aspects as constituting a role model: e.g. respect for pupils, which includes accepting their ideas and choices; being organised, using good language, being positive and not prejudiced. They also indicated that their personalities, values and behaviour made up a role model, which may influence pupils. This is in line with Bruners' (1977) theory, which reveals that the teacher is a personal symbol in the educational process, a figure with whom the pupils can identify and compare themselves to. From Mead's (1934) sociological viewpoint, the conscious mind, self-awareness and self-regulation were central. In Mead's (1934) view the development of the consciousness of self is an essential part of the process of becoming a human being, and Pollard (1985) explains that it provides a basis for thought and behaviour.

It is of concern that just about half of the teachers could explain how they may show understanding and were conscious of how they might be an example to pupils. Recalling Mead (1934), people act as they do on the basis of the circumstances as they define them. They act as they do out of their beliefs and understanding (Cuff and Payne, 1980). The pupils in the classroom are the teachers' reality, and both teachers and pupils are objects in their environment. Mead (Hewitt, 1996) maintained that pupils look upon themselves as objects and receive themselves as others do. Therefore, teachers' perspectives may influence pupils. Kyriacou (1991) emphasises that teachers' behaviour may influence pupils' learning and he highlights teachers' knowledge about own behaviour. The teacher's role is to discover children's possibilities, to understand how they learn and to foster their development (Woods, 1983:42-43). According to transactional models of learning the teacher's role is to create circumstances that help pupils to integrate their capacities and interpretations with those of significant others around them. This is



because “learning involves the sharing and testing of intersubjective meanings and the negotiation of interpretations through interaction and the exercise of empathy (taking the role of other)” (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:116).

The results of this study indicate that in half of the classes in the sample many pupils’ individual needs are not taken into account, nor are they accepted or respected. This is likely to be because of the lack of teachers’ knowledge and understanding; learning opportunities are not individualised, information is not gathered from parents and the curriculum does not correspond to pupils’ individual needs, interest and abilities. For about half of the teachers, it was also unclear, what is empathetic behaviour and how they function as examples for pupils. Consequently, it is likely that pupils’ development is not adequately taken care of. As teachers-pupil interaction plays a fundamental part in pupils learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1987), this situation will affect the learning generally but especially the learning of pupils with special needs.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

#### ***8.1 Highlights from the Findings***

The results explored in Chapter 5, 6, and 7 include: a) the major findings for all teachers in small and large schools, b) the characteristics and situation of the small school.

##### **8.1.1 The overall findings in Small and Large Schools**

The extensive questionnaire, which was sent to all small schools in Northeast Iceland, with good rates of return, indicates that the expected high valuation of small schools did not materialise. This information shows how the staff of small schools use the particular circumstances which the low enrolment in their schools would seem to offer: relationships, attention to pupils with special needs, teaching in multi-grade classes, developing the curriculum, and co-operation with parents and teachers. The field notes recorded through classroom observation and the results from interviews with twenty teachers verify all the outcomes. The classroom observations indicate that just over half of the teachers in both types of schools facilitate pupils learning in a constructive way, teach them to respect individual differences and to show empathetic behaviour in their interaction with pupils, and thereby set a good example for them. However, despite the high expectations from teachers' views on small schools, the data collected fail to support the idea that all teachers in small schools are more likely to value their institutions and to believe that the school situation itself has had noticeable effects on their behaviour and relationships.

Overall, when analysed by systematic observation, no significant differences appear to be in teachers' behaviour in small and large schools. This refers to teachers' body posture, physical openness, facial expression, and appropriate use of touch and use of voice. However, the

analysis of the field notes on teachers' use of teaching approaches, methods of discipline, empathetic behaviour and provisions for pupils with special needs, show that teachers' individual practice and behaviour in the classrooms varies greatly and this behaviour does not relate to the size of class or size of school. Not only can the reason for this be related to the generic differences of the observed behavioural aspects, but also to the instrument used for the observation. Although the accuracy of the observation scheme had been tested and could be regarded as fairly reliable, the quantitative coding seems not to have been sufficiently sensitive. First, the recording was done with five minutes intervals. A more frequent recording might have been needed and it would have been preferable to carry out the observations over a longer period of time in each classroom. This might have created a variety of contexts and brought the researcher closer to the core of the activities of the classes.

However, the field notes helped to minimise the complications suggested above. By recording teachers' behaviour, the researcher did not lose the detail of the teacher-pupil interaction or the concern for the particular (Hargreaves, 1975). The field notes also helped in the study of physical settings and in bringing overt and observable behaviour into focus, which means that meaningful behaviour was not lost from view (Burgess, 1986:181). Thus, it may be asserted that valid evidence about the actions of the subject of study was obvious to the observer, through both objective reality of activities and subjective meanings and symbols (Blumer, 1969). In this way, an attempt was made to take into account the meaning teachers devoted to their interaction and this was also how questions about teachers' actions were answered.

Overall, teachers' behaviour in relation to their practice in the classroom is grouped in three categories: *outstanding teachers (55%), average teachers (10%) and poor teachers (35%)*.

The 'outstanding teachers' show continuous awareness of pupils' conditions and are attentive to pupils' verbal and non-verbal behaviour,

they create a harmony in the classroom and thereby show empathetic behaviour. They seem to organise the teaching according to the diverse needs of each child. The discipline in the classrooms seems to be intrinsic and these teachers speak with a low, soft voice, which again is reflected in pupils' way of speaking. These teachers also arrange special programs for pupils with special needs.

The teachers categorised as 'average' (10%) taught the whole class the same task and then attended to individuals. Their teaching methods were monotonous. These teachers maintained good order but failed to show empathy and encouraging behaviour in the classroom.

On the other hand, the teachers categorised as '*poor teachers*' use homogeneous teaching methods and do not seem to consider pupils' individual needs. They are distant or distracted and the method of discipline in the classroom is either strict or missing. These teachers' work is disorganised and confusing for the students. Their classroom management and the quality of their interaction with the pupils are somewhat unstable or even poor. The small numbers of pupils in the classes in small schools do not seem to make it easier for the teachers to organise their teaching. It is notable that just fewer than three quarters of these teachers had over twenty years of teaching experience. Even so, their approaches, at least in some cases, seem to prohibit progress and learning.

The above outcomes are reflected in the interview analysis: Five teachers in each type of school could explicitly explain their understanding of their empathetic behaviour. Almost three quarters of them think it is important to create a caring and warm atmosphere between teachers and pupils, based on mutual trust. About half of the teachers say that a climate of trust is fostered by discussions, physical closeness and by showing individual children interest. Just over half of the teachers could present their ideas about how they might be an example to pupils, which involves: e.g. respect for pupils; accepting their

ideas and choices; being organised; using good language, and being positive and not prejudiced. Some teachers find it difficult to explain their own behaviour.

The consensus between the results of the three contrasting methods should increase the reliability of this study. The researcher's attempt consciously to apply empathy and unconditional positive reward was helpful during the interviews. Nevertheless, the study may have its limitations, the most important one being perhaps that, in the qualitative research, the teachers were not chosen randomly. Instead, in seven small schools and eight large schools, the head teacher chose the participants. In the other schools the teachers came forward and indicated their willingness to take part. Thus, it is possible that the teachers were chosen because of their qualifications, which may have made the results more loaded than would otherwise have been the case. Another limitation might relate to the recording of behaviour during the systematic observation, as discussed before in this section.

Further, the large classes in this study were perhaps too few to warrant generalisations. The teachers responded to many questions that were accompanied by follow-up questions, and they were not reluctant to talk about themselves or other relevant issues. Nevertheless, they certainly did not reveal everything. It would have been interesting to have them describe in more detail their own understanding of services and practice to pupils with special needs.

### 8.1.2 Theory on Small Schools

The results of this study present a picture of small schools that is considerably different from research results on small schools found in other countries (e.g. Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Galton, 1989; Miller, 1989; Waugh, 1991). Neither are the results in agreement with prevailing views on the positive characteristics of small schools. Nevertheless, some of the results are in line with what researchers have

found to be the situation of small schools in Iceland (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990). Teachers in small schools are characterised by polarisation with regard to their behaviour, understanding and practices.

The main conclusions regarding teachers in small schools are:

- Half of the teachers in the small schools are not focused on the problems of pupils with special needs, while the other half falls under the definition of 'outstanding' teachers.
- Most of the teachers in the small schools use a limited range of teaching methods.
- Half of the teachers in the small schools do not show empathy in their behaviour, while the other half falls under the definition of 'outstanding' teachers.
- Most of the teachers in the small schools do not interact effectively with parents and colleagues.
- The most important factors in predicting teacher competence are the personal characteristics of the incumbent and there appear to be relationships between particular personal characteristics and teachers' practices in the classroom.

The above results may be affected by the fact that it was the class teachers who were observed and interviewed. In the survey it was this group of teachers who repeatedly had different views from the other respondents (head-teachers, subject teachers, special teachers and unqualified teachers). They had less faith in the advantages of small schools; a higher percentage of them do not participate in the design of the school's curriculum; two-thirds say that small schools do not make it easier to meet pupils' individual needs; half of them say that they seldom or never participate in the curriculum development; most of them say that small schools do not facilitate relationships among pupils; just under half of them think the small schools do not facilitate close relationships with parents and that the school has not organised co-operation with parents, and half of them feel they are always or often professionally isolated.

Most teachers in small schools think that pupils with special needs should attend ordinary schools. They are willing to teach these pupils and have, in fact undertaken the responsibility of teaching them. However, half of them feel unprepared for this undertaking. This is manifested in a number of ways. There is a lack of understanding of the concept of special needs and these teachers had problems to explain the concept in broad terms. Differentiation is rare and teachers lack ways of evaluating pupils' needs, as well as many teachers in small schools do not apply teaching methods that are suited to multi-grade teaching. These teachers fall back on methods, which are not suitable, such as providing all pupils in a class with the same task at the same time.

Most teachers in small schools think they are sensitive to pupils' needs; yet, many of them cannot explain what such behaviour involves on their behalf. They have not thought about how they show empathy or establish trust between themselves and pupils or how they may influence pupils or be an example to pupils. Teachers' behaviour in the classroom is characterised by lack of knowledge about their own share in the interaction process.

The predominance of informal interaction within small schools is a recurrent phenomenon in this study. It applies to interaction with pupils, fellow teachers and parents. Through this, the lack of deep insight into the issues involved in teaching is once again manifested. There are teachers in small schools who consider it necessary to discuss and talk about pupils' behaviour in the classroom. However, other teachers think that a warm and caring atmosphere is created automatically. In contradiction to this view, teachers also state that teacher-pupil interaction is based on teachers' interpersonal skills. Yet, they have problems in defining these skills. The family-like atmosphere in small school, it must be admitted, seems to give rise to a more informal way of interaction and organisation within the schools, which results in unintentional schoolwork and the above noted lack of formality.

Many teachers in small schools feel that formal relations with parents are unnecessary, and regard the closeness of the community in a positive light, while others feel threatened by this closeness and refuse co-operation with parents and colleagues. The smallness of the community and the close social relationships within it often turn out to be a burden to teachers in small schools and cause difficulties in establishing formal co-operation within the school and the community. Since parents are mainly contacted when things go wrong, the line of communication with them has been blocked in many of the small schools. As a result many teachers not only fail to obtain the necessary information from parents but also to organise their work in an orderly fashion. Teachers in small schools find it unnecessary to hold organised meetings, since they are working at close quarters all day. Some teachers deliberately avoid all meetings with colleagues but most of them say that their meetings take the form of a chat. It may be that this type of informal talk is their intentional method of dealing with practical issues. Nevertheless, other findings of this study show that teachers in small schools tend not to reflect seriously on school issues. Therefore, their informal meetings are not likely to be focused on pedagogy.

Generally, there is a lack of formal co-operation within the small schools. This seems to be due to the absence of constructive discussion within the schools about relevant issues. However, some teachers in small schools reported participation in joint developmental projects with other schools. Working on these joint projects, the same teachers maintained, had strengthened the co-operation between staff in their own school. A good many teachers in these schools seem capable of initiating co-operation and constructive development of their work. Yet, quite a number of them express a feeling of isolation. By isolating themselves and by keeping interaction on an informal level, teachers seek an escape from uncomfortable situations, pupils' problems being one of them. The reasons for the sometimes problematic situation of small schools in Iceland may be numerous. The schools system itself places the responsibility of meeting the needs of all children with class teachers,



even though some teachers have not received the necessary training. Teacher training in Iceland has not prepared prospective teachers for meeting the needs of children with special needs. Training courses to meet this need have also been too few and too far between. Teachers have limited access to counselling and professional support for teaching children with special needs. Many schools employ special teachers but their time is often taken up by teaching, leaving them no scope for counselling other teachers.

The study showed more indicators suggesting that the root of the problems of teachers in small schools can be traced to a fault in their basic training. In Iceland, teacher training has until recently not taken into account teaching of multi-grade classes. Only a short time ago, few courses on the subject have been open to teachers. The teachers use individual seatwork as the main teaching method, one that is rarely suited to individual needs. Walking among the children and attending to them individually seems to have developed as a prominent teaching method. This gives rise to the thought that teachers may regard walking among pupils as their main responsibility, a way to be visible. It seems that many teachers use the methods to which they are most accustomed, that they are oblivious to their own teaching methods and restrict themselves to familiar practices. This conclusion is in line with the frequent occurrence of results indicating that teachers in small schools are unaware of their own ideas and practices with regard to teaching.

Teachers' lack of knowledge and ideas about their own behaviour may also, partly at least, be traced back to teacher training. Teacher training in Iceland does not ensure skilful teacher-pupil interaction. Students in teacher training in Iceland are not specially trained in human interaction skills (Curriculum of the University of Akureyri 1999-2000; Curriculum of the Iceland University of Education, 1999-2000). However, a part of the cause may also be that they have not learned to contemplate their own behaviour and how to view their own work and position within the schools system. These teachers are simply carrying out their job. This

view is commonly accepted in Icelandic society, people do not necessarily give much thought to why or how they carry out their work. This lack of ideas about one's own behaviour may also be due to the ideal type: 'a teacher'. The teachers' answers indicate that they compare themselves to some image and they may feel that they do not measure up to it. This is particularly the case with older teachers who seem to have a very vague impression of themselves as teachers.

It is also possible that teachers in small schools avoid formal interaction, which demands that difficult issues are tackled, without being aware of doing so, hanging instead on to informal interaction where it is easy to evade uncomfortable and demanding issues. The findings of this study on the unconscious perceptions of teachers in small schools supports this hypothesis. It is very likely that this kind of informal interaction negatively affects children's learning. This matter will be further discussed in the following section.

## **8.2 Implications of the Findings and the Theoretical Issues arising**

The implications of the study are to be found in the areas of: a) teacher-pupil interaction and the influence of the teacher as a person in this interaction, b) the implications of teachers' thinking on pupils who experience learning difficulties, and c) practices in small schools and d) teachers' learning.

### **8.2.1 Teacher-Pupil Interaction and the Teacher as a Person**

In this study, there are obvious indications that teachers' perceptions, behaviour and practice are crucial classroom factors that influence pupils' learning and environment. The results showed that the quality of teachers' interaction with pupils in the classroom varied greatly and seemed to be unrelated to class size. It may be suggested that these teachers would show similar behaviour and practice in any type of class, because their behaviour seems to be linked to their confidence, experience, knowledge, skills and understanding. Just over half of the teachers are focused on the problems of pupils who experience learning difficulties, they show empathetic behaviour, their teaching is well organised and there is harmony in their classrooms. However, in this study, it became apparent that many teachers do not make use of the possibilities of the small number of pupils in class in Icelandic schools. This evidence may indicate that key elements are overlooked in their teaching: the child's strengths, weaknesses and circumstances of learning; the influence of teachers' thinking; and optimal means for achieving these goals (Norwich, 1990:131; Hart, 1996), as well as pupils' fundamental rights to education are not respected (Educational Act, 1995; UNESCO, 1994). Overall, teachers' behaviour in relation to their practice in the classroom is grouped in three categories: *outstanding teachers (55%), average teachers (10%) and poor teachers (35%)*.

The classroom observations and the interviews revealed that the positive personal qualities of teachers' involve that of being relaxed, using low voice, listening, and being attentive. They showed continuous awareness of pupils' conditions and were attentive to both pupils' verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The teachers who showed these characteristics also had clear ideas about their behaviour, about their work and how they can be an example to pupils; they were interested in and had knowledge about pupils' individual needs, resulting in appropriate programmes for the pupils. They seemed to organise the teaching according to the diverse needs of each child. These behaviour and practice of these teachers seemed to lead to harmony in the classroom. The discipline in the classrooms was intrinsic, which again was reflected in pupils' behaviour.

The above findings showed that teachers' empathetic behaviour requires that they are attentive to pupils' verbal and non-verbal behaviour and that they are conscious of what is 'behind' pupils' outward communication. These findings seem to be consistent with the earlier findings of Rogers (1980) who argued that empathetic behaviour involves to actively understand pupils, and reach out to receive their communication and the meaning that matches at least those aspects of their awareness that are most important to them at a certain moment (Rogers, 1980:143-144). As was shown in the observations and revealed in the interviews, the prerequisite for this type of listening is using both verbal and non-verbal messages, with the teacher giving feedback with a low, soft voice and/or non-verbal behaviour. The voice can indicate how emotionally responsive one is (Nelson-Jones, 1993). The 'outstanding teachers' seemed, as expressed by Egan (1985), to be 'fully there', meaning that they provide full psychological or social-emotional presence.

As observed by the systematic observations, and told in the interviews, about half of the teachers seemed to have created mutual trust between themselves and pupils. The trust they said was fostered by discussions, physical closeness and by showing individual children interest. A teacher

who uses reflective listening and is conscious about this process illustrates this:

*First of all I want to say that eye contact indicates listening. I try to make eye contact with pupils when they are talking to me, I answer, and I nod and repeat. With help of your body language you can show that you understand. You can also rephrase what is said. I apply active listening by using these skills (a teacher in a small school).*

Symbolic interactionists (SI) would argue that, this teacher sensed his 'self', which SI regard as particularly important. Symbolic interactionists would maintain that the 'outstanding teachers' were aware of what is expected of them, and that they try to adjust their actions accordingly, which is consistent with findings of this study. Half of the teachers, five in each type of school, could explicitly explain their understanding of their empathetic behaviour. Almost three quarters of them think it is important to create a caring and warm atmosphere between teachers and pupils, based on mutual trust. Just over half of the teachers could present their ideas about how they might be an example to pupils, which involves, e.g. respecting pupils; accepting their ideas and choices; being well organised; speaking well and kindly, and being positive and not prejudiced. Burns (1982) has explained that teachers' behaviour influences the formation of the child's own self-concept, which has been found to play a vital part in pupils' educational achievement and engagement. The 'outstanding teachers' showed self-confidence, which Burns (1980) says is a trait to be found frequently in teachers who are emotionally stable. Their behaviour seemed to indicate emotional stability. They seemed to allow themselves to be accepting human beings; to relate to the pupils as well as being a teacher; to consider pupils' individual needs; to show their feelings and be sensitive, which again may create a climate of trust in the classroom (Hirst and Peters, 1991).

On the other hand, one third of the teachers observed, the teachers categorised as '*poor teachers*,' did not show empathetic behaviour in the classroom and in the interviews they could not openly explain their

understanding of empathetic behaviour. Their classroom management and the quality of their interaction with the pupils were unstable or even poor. They were distant or distracted and the method of discipline in the classroom was either strict or missing. As a result, harmonic atmosphere in the classroom was lacking. More importantly they had unclear ideas about their own behaviour and how they might be an example to pupils. It is notable that just fewer than three quarters of these teachers had over twenty years of teaching experience. These teachers seemed to lack self-understanding and their interaction skills were poor. Burns (1982) found that teachers' perceptions might restrict learning opportunities. The findings of the present study showed that the 'poor teachers' interaction was within the limits of what was necessary; in some of the classes the discipline was strict, in others it was missing; there seemed to be little space to consider individual needs, and pupils work and behaviour often seemed abandoned. In a class of seven pupils, neither a method of teaching nor a method of discipline was observed; the teacher seemed puzzled, resulting in the pupils being confused. While five children stood in a queue at the teachers' desk for most of the teaching time, waiting for attention, two children lay under a table, played and made noises. The teacher seemed to have problems with inter-relations and management. Hirst and Peters (1991) have clarified how, in such a class, the atmosphere can become impersonal and cold because the teacher neither gives nor receives. In addition, the negative messages observed may affect the worth and abilities of pupils as learners. Burns (1981) has showed that pupils may lose faith in themselves, become anxious, develop self-doubt, and on the whole their communication may become poor, which again may lead to other symptoms, such as aggression.

Schön (1983) makes a distinction between two types of thinking that teachers use in their practice. He explains that the concept 'knowing in action' is the spontaneous expertise that teachers use automatically most of the time (Schön, 1983). The thinking behind 'knowing in action' may be unconsidered; important factors or perceptions regarding a child's learning might not be noticed or they might be taken for granted.

Therefore, the teacher might not realise a child's potential. On the other hand, 'reflecting in action' or reflecting practice, which Schön (1983) relates to abilities such as to feel, to see and notice is a more precise, intentional kind of thinking (Schön, 1987:78-79). In other words, reflecting in action is to show empathetic behaviour and focusing on what one is doing as demonstrated by the 'outstanding teachers.' They did not interfere, they were attentive, listened and respected individuals. In addition they encouraged pupils imitation; praised and reprimanded when suitable.

As discussed above, it was observed and supported in the interviews that the 'outstanding teachers' seemed to care for and about pupils. As Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) argue: caring for pupils is more than the interpersonal experience of human nurturance, relationships, warmth and love. It implies moral and social responsibilities on behalf of the teacher. The 'outstanding teachers' seemed to interpret situations and to decide what is important and what to ignore; they seemed to be responsible for fulfilling a variety of functions and activities simultaneously and speedily, and they approached their teaching according to pupils' individual needs. Nias (1987:3-4) refers to Abercrombie's account of perceptions: Research has shown that an individual teacher's views of specific pupils and many of their actions within and outside the classroom are determined by the constructs and/or perspectives that they have acquired. This state of mind has been referred to as 'schemata'. Changes in perception only occur when new schemata are formed (Nias, 1989). To make judgments, teachers need to interpret carefully, not least about pupils who experience learning difficulties. This evidence shows that teachers need to reflect openly because it makes new and alternative possibilities possible. If teachers have developed schemata that are based on firm patterns of perceptions, they might not see new possibilities or new meanings. Nias, (1989:13) maintains that it is difficult and often painful to change fundamental mental structures or organizations of past experience.

The most important finding of this study was to identify the personal characteristics of teachers as being strong predictors of teaching competence. Specifically, teachers' perceptions seem to be reflected in their practice and appeared to have considerable influence on pupils' learning. This is not a surprising finding, given that many researchers have suggested that teachers' perspectives influence the way in which they relate to pupils (Butler, 1994; Carr and Krutz-Costes, 1994; Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991; Good and Brophy, 1991; Hart, 1996 and 1998; Nias, 1987 and 1992). From the results it may be suggested that teachers' behaviour may affect pupils' thoughts, experience and learning. The literature reviewed in Chapter 1 and 2 showed that each interaction between people forms a part of a series of interconnected sets such as context, messages and feedback. Blumer (1969) clarifies how this continuous process of interaction can influence individuals and how it is a basis for co-operative activity necessary for functioning in society, by taking the role of the other', the self acquires its reflexive quality and attains self-consciousness (Blumer, 1969). This effect may be even more pronounced when there are children who have learning difficulties. Dockrell and McShane (1993) found that an intervention programme, although well organised, may fail if the relationship between a child, who experiences difficulties and a teacher do not facilitate co-operation and participation. Children have deep-seated psychological needs that are especially relevant regarding the needs for stimulation, novelty and environmental mastery. A failure to satisfy such needs may affect the child's development (Hirst and Peters, 1991). Only half of the teachers observed and interviewed in the small schools were focused on the problems of pupils with special needs, while the other half obviously considered pupils' individual needs.

This evidence indicates that teachers do not only need to understand how learning occurs, they also need to understand their own perception and how their perspectives to a situation at a given time may affect pupils. This is in line with the earlier findings of Rogers (1980). When a teacher has the ability to understand pupils' reactions from inside, a sensitive



awareness of pupils' needs, and is receptive and understands how pupils' perceive the learning; the likelihood of significant learning is increased (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994:157). These results relates to transactional models of learning in which the teachers' role is to create circumstances that help pupils to integrate their capacities and interpretations with those of significant others around them. This occurs because learning involves the sharing and testing of intersubjective meanings and the negotiation of interpretations through interaction and the exercise of empathy ('taking the role of other') (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996:116). From Hart's (1996) point of view reflective practice or careful interpretation is not sufficient for understanding pupils' learning. She introduces the concept 'innovative thinking', which is partly based on teachers' empathetic behaviour, but mainly focuses on teachers' testing of own thinking, as well as pupils' intersubjective meanings of behaviour and actions. 'Innovative thinking' can help teachers to transform their concerns about children's learning and difficulties into a new understanding. This issue will be further discussed in the following section.

### 8.2.2 Education for All Pupils

Although this study only provides a limited answer to the question of how pupils' with learning difficulties are provided for, there are several findings to indicate that the 'outstanding teachers', are confident; that they are able to meet the needs of all pupils, and that they believe that all pupils can succeed. On the other hand, one third of the teachers observed and interviewed seem not to have considered the educational values and the social context suitable for the individual child. One third of the schools appeared not to have implemented a school curriculum; in which all pupils' individual needs are recognised and appropriate procedures for those pupils are not obvious to the teachers. The reasons for this lack of procedures for children with special needs may be manifold. These teachers do seem to lack understanding and appreciation of individual differences, and to lack self-confidence and interaction skills. They are not able to utilise effectively either small classes or multi-grade teaching,

and most importantly they seem not to be united around an ideology necessary for a holistic learning plan for pupils with special needs.

In this study, most of the participants were willing to teach pupils who experience learning difficulties and have, in fact, undertaken the responsibility of teaching them. However, half of them feel unprepared for this undertaking, as was manifested in a number of ways. There is a lack of understanding of the concept of special needs and these teachers had problems to explaining the concept in broad terms. Differentiation was rare and teachers lacked ways of evaluating pupils' needs. Furthermore, many teachers in small schools did not apply teaching methods that are suited to multi-grade teaching. These teachers fell back on unsuitable methods, such as providing all pupils in a class with the same task at the same time.

The International Salamanca Statement and Framework for Actions in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994:8) declare inclusion of all children in mainstream education as a human right. This ideal requires that teachers are meant to have all children in an ordinary classrooms learning together, because they have all equal right to mainstream education and to be valued equally as was the case in the schools in this study. The Salamanca declaration highlights progressive principles, but there is arguably a division between decision-making and provisions. Even though the principles are ideologically and organisationally an exemplary mode, there is a real danger that many children, not least pupils who experience learning difficulties, will remain outside the framework and be forgotten. Inclusion as explained by the Salamanca Statement does not assume that special teachers are always available to teach these children. They are present more in the roles of co-ordinators, co-planners or co-teachers. The responsibility for teaching all children is therefore brought to class teachers, as was the reality in this study.

The inclusion policy has had a great impact on education in many countries in Europe and in the USA. Clark et al., (1995) refer to several

studies on inclusion (Booth, 1995/1996; Vlachou and Barton, 1994; Ware, 1995 and Zigmond and Baker, 1995/1996) that give an account of the complexity of inclusive education. While in some schools practices are genuinely inclusive, others schools display conservatism and resistance to inclusive practice. Teachers often resist the moves towards inclusion and the promotion of inclusion is dependent of finding ways of enabling change in teachers' attitudes, values and practices (Vlachou and Barton, 1994). The reason for this conflict may be that although teachers are willing to undertake the responsibility of including all pupils in their classes, they may feel unqualified to carry out this responsibility, as demonstrated by almost half the teachers in this study.

When questioned, most of the teachers thought they were sensitive to pupils' needs; yet, half of them could not explain what such behaviour involves. The interviews showed that the 'poor teachers' seemed not to consider pupils' individual needs and they had problems in explaining their understanding of special needs. Their teaching approaches, at least in some cases, seem to prohibit progress and learning. Overall, the study revealed that these teachers seemed not to have a thorough understanding of individual differences, and therefore they appeared not to have discovered the children's possibilities. Their inter-relations in the classroom were deprived.

However, it was observed (Table 6.5 and Table 6.6), and validated in the interviews that the 'outstanding teachers' create circumstances that benefit pupils. First, interaction, based on empathetic behaviour and therefore understanding of meanings; teachers' attentive and sensitive behaviour; their perception and appreciation of pupils' differences, seems to provide educational support for learning. Second, these teachers say they provide all pupils with individualistic programs according to their needs and many of them design special programs for pupils who experience difficulties. Their attention is on these pupils' current position and circumstances, and they seem to avoid labelling pupils in categories. They do not seem to give accounts of how the children might

be failing, rather they seem to create and provide educational provisions that suit the individual child. The results showed that these teachers were willing to teach pupils with special needs and they had undertaken the responsibility. According to recent findings, successful inclusion initiatives are largely dependent on educators' attitudes. Under such circumstances all children might experience themselves as belonging to the class, including those with significant difficulties (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). As such,

...inclusion embraces the concept of diversity as a natural state of being human (or in educational sense of being a learner) (Bayliss, 1997).

None of the participants in the systematic observations and interviews had acquired formal training in how to deal with learning difficulties. Research has shown (Avramidis et al., 2000) that an important factor in improving teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive policy is knowledge about children who experience learning difficulties, gained through formal studies. Without a coherent plan for teacher training in the educational needs of children with special educational needs, attempts to include these children in ordinary schools are difficult (Avramidis et al., 2000:277). Avramidis et al. (2000) findings seem to be inadequate, as they do not seem to take the influence of teachers' personality into account. The results of the present study have shown that inclusion occurs independent of the teacher's knowledge of learning difficulties and the results indicate that successful inclusion is largely dependent upon teacher personality and interaction skills.

In a project carried out in four European countries, it was found that schools found their own way of dealing with inclusive schooling, but the basic factor in relation to inclusion is the positive attitude of staff as well as parents Eggertsdóttir (2000). An example of the influence of professionals' attitudes and values is revealed in the terminology within special education. There has been the tendency to interpret educational difficulties in terms of 'within-child deficit'. This contradicts the findings of the present study. In the interviews, it came forward that the

‘outstanding teachers’ attention was on the pupils’ current position and circumstances and they seemed to avoid labelling pupils in categories. They did not seem to give accounts of how the children might be failing, rather they seemed to create and provide educational provisions that suited the individual child. This indicates that it is important to focus attention on the child’s current position, its circumstances, its needs, and how they can be provided for. The participants also seemed to be confident enough to use their knowledge and skills for the potential of the children. These findings are inline with the earlier findings of Hart (1996). She argues that in order to open new opportunities, the language of ‘learning difficulties’ and ‘special needs’, should be set aside, because it constrains our thinking and limits our sense of the scope available to us for positive invention. The ‘outstanding teachers’ seem to have drawn their attention to possibilities within the ordinary school and opened up possibilities for all children in their class. At the same time they have had the opportunity to enhance their understanding of children’s learning.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 showed that innovative thinking is concerned with the teachers’ thinking (Hart, 1996). It directs attention to the teacher who may need to change his/her thinking before an appropriate educational opportunity can be offered. During the different moves, the idea is that a self-check process occurs about own practice and thinking is put forward. This means that the teacher will think more intentionally about his/her own practice and that external ideas are incorporated in the reflective process. S/he actively analyses self-perceptions and views the learner from alternative viewpoints; s/he transforms concerns about children’s learning into new understanding and analyses the educational context as a whole. Thus, the decisive factor in the conduct of teachers’ work remains their perception of themselves, and their pupils and their understanding of how learning occurs. Such practice is distinct from routine, blind and compulsive action, which often is guided by long traditions.

Innovative thinking involves empathy; a behaviour that was clearly demonstrated by the 'outstanding teachers', who showed continuous awareness of pupils' conditions. However, teachers who use innovative thinking go further in their practice as they deliberately analyse their own thinking (Hart, 1996). Innovative thinking leads the teacher to consciously review possibilities for understanding a child's learning, because the teacher generates new ideas when responding to children's learning. Innovative thinking derives from practice with children who have experienced difficulties in the classroom, but the focus is no longer a narrow sight of a child's deficits on personal characteristics or biographical limitations.

What seems to be of importance is the nature of teachers' thinking and understanding of children's learning, the thinking that teachers bring to their practice. Through innovative thinking, teachers become aware of their own thinking, actions and consequences as well as moral responsibilities. To be able to consider intentionally, to what extent one's own feelings, desires or fears may have an impact on the interpretations of a child's learning, involves good understanding of self. A built-in self-monitoring process can help the teacher to have a confidence in an idea and provide an opportunity to learn about one self. Hart (1996) maintains that feelings may be the most powerful of all determining factors in what possibilities teachers see and what possibilities they consistently rule out or overlook. The 'outstanding teachers' seemed to be optimistic and confident about themselves and think in positive terms about their behaviour in the classroom and about teaching. These results are consistent with the findings of Combs and Gonzalez (1994) who found that positive self-image has vital effects on a persons' freedom to confront new matters. It provides a firm foundation from which to deal with life with security and confidence

Many possibilities for enhancing children's learning and achievement will be overlooked if teachers' sights are limited. Hart (1996) found that there is a need to focus on mainstream practice, not because it may turn

out to be the source of difficulties, but because the knowledge of the dynamics of teaching and learning is our main source of insight into possibilities that might be tried in response to concerns about children's learning.

### 8.2.3 Practices in Small Schools and Teachers' Learning.

Compared with England and Wales, which seem to have the highest number of children per class of the OECD countries, all classes in this study were indeed small. In 1996 the average class size at primary level in England was 27.5 (Blatchford and Martin, 1998). The average class size in the small schools in their survey was 9.2 pupils, but in the observed classes there were 9.6 pupils in the small schools and 17.8 pupils in the large schools. There is lack of evidence on the effects of class size. Finn and Voelkl (cited by Blatchford and Martin, 1998) found that classroom processes that distinguish small from large classes are far from clear. The quality of small rural schools is enormously variable because of:

... the small size of their [small schools] staff, they become highly sensitive to the personal and professional qualities of their teachers, more so than larger schools (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987:149).

Learning is affected by a range of interacting factors, some of which can be traced to the teacher as a person, as discussed above. Another reason seems to be teachers' professionalism.

In the survey it was revealed that an apparent lack of planning in the organisation of the curriculum seems to exist in many small schools. The responses to questions about the school curriculum seemed to indicate that the preparation and planning of a school curriculum in many schools is not worked out collaboratively. The overall uncertainty that emerged in answers to questions about curriculum, and the low response to all the questions about this issue seems to indicate that, small-school teachers do not feel empowered to engage in curriculum planning. This lack of curriculum design in small schools was also found in the UK by Galton

(1990:73) and in Iceland (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990).

Additionally, teaching methods in the multi-grade classes seem to be monotonous. One third of the teachers provide all pupils with the same tasks at the same time and the most common practice in the classroom is individual seatwork. This approach to teaching is in accordance to earlier findings in small schools in Iceland (Harðardóttir and Magnússon, 1990; Sigurgeirsson, 1991). Individualistic teaching is characterised by individual seatwork and the teacher spends a large proportion of his or her time in one-to-one interaction. Interaction of this kind has proved to be of little use for pupils. Alexander found that the more accessible teachers seek to make themselves available to all their pupils as individuals, the less time they have for direct, extended and challenging interaction with any of them (Alexander, 1992:66).

It may be that teachers apply monotonous teaching approaches because they find teaching in multi-grade classes difficult (DES, 1982; Eggertsdóttir, 1999; Veeman et al., 1987). Neither teacher training nor in-service in Iceland have highlighted approaches for teaching multi-grade classes. Therefore, teachers may lack knowledge and understanding to take a structured approach to differentiation within the curriculum in the learning process. The study also shows that teachers apply whole class teaching, in spite of pupils' different ages and different grade. Shapson et al. (cited by Blatchford and Martin, 1998) suggest that teachers do not alter their style of teaching when faced with a smaller class, which results in missing opportunities. The teachers in this study may have developed schemata that are based on firm patterns of perceptions; they might not see new possibilities or new meanings. This problem was discussed in the previous section.

Overall, the results show that only a few teachers organise their teaching on the basis of approaches, such as topic work and co-operative learning that are suitable in multi-grade classes; pupils are not having the opportunity to work together to accomplish shared social and academic goals. This problem is known to exist in other countries. Bennett



(1994:56), for example, found that the social context for learning in the majority of primary schools in Britain is a small group, but that the typical group practice is not co-operative. Pupils are sitting together but working alone. In the USA, Antil, Jenkins, Wayne and Vadsey (1998) found that 93% of teachers studied subscribed to co-operative learning to obtain both social and academic goals, but when the researchers applied criteria for co-operative learning derived from research literature, few teachers were actually applying recognised forms of this practice. In the present study, few teachers seemed to apply co-operative learning approaches. Thus, pupils' social development may be hampered; they may miss the opportunity of experiencing participation, involvement and personal insight from joint experiences as learners. Pupils feel that learning opportunities are increased when teaching strategies are transactional, i.e. when teachers involve the integration of pupils concerns and interests with the teachers' objectives. Cooper and McIntyre, (1996) found that such 'bi-directional' processes are facilitated by use of interactive and reactive teaching approaches.

In this survey, it appeared from the systematic observations and in the interviews it appeared that most of the teachers use a limited range of teaching methods. Overall, they emphasised individualistic teaching, and pupils were not working together to accomplish shared goals and tasks encouraged to learn co-operatively. Researchers in the UK have found that one way to increase the quality of interaction in the classroom is to exploit much more fully the potential of collaborative tasks within groups (Galton, 1989; Alexander, 1992). Co-operative learning is widely accepted because of its potential for achieving multiple educational goals. It accommodates individual differences, and reaches both academic and social learning aims within a single approach (Antil et al., 1998). It may be regarded that co-operative activity in the classroom can provide support between peers and refers not least to pupils that experience learning difficulties. Having a co-operative learning partner may empower the pupils to act by feeling strong, capable and committed. The social support and accountability to valued peers motivates

committed efforts to achieve and succeed. Students who are 'at risk' of dropping out and/or failing are especially in need of caring and committed relationships, social support, positive self-images, and higher achievement. Symbolic Interactionists would argue that, it is through such activities and engagement, that children would interpret and internalise a variety of roles and gain understanding of how people act within their social world. In this way, gradually, the self arises from social experience of interacting with others (Blumer, 1969; mead, 1934). Importantly, the child learns who she or he is and how she or he relates to others. The importance of the social context is therefore crucial, both for children's learning and social development.

Children with disabilities need expanded individual attention and teaching approaches adapted to their individual needs. Children with learning difficulties do not have cognitive functions that enable them to access information. Approaches must be identified at an appropriate level. Brown (1985) found that pupils must be taught strategies appropriate for their level of cognitive functioning and she argues that by scaffolding functions, teachers could help to bridge gaps, by activating problem solving in the child. This approach may be a part of developing communicative roles in the classroom and enabling pupils to be more actively involved. The prominent feature of such activity is multiple forms of teaching, understanding and socially created activity. As such, education involves a process of interaction between the developing child and the teachers and peers.

In this study, many teachers seem to regard contact with parents as threatening or as an extra burden. This situation may indicate that teachers are unable to share concern with those who care most about the child. The study reveals that parents are not asked to provide information about their children, or asked about their wishes, expectations and knowledge. However, parents are contacted when something goes wrong. By this approach to communication, the message given to both pupils and parents is that the link between the school and

the home is based on negative messages. This approach might obviously put parents in a defensive position and is not likely to build positive links between parents and the school. It may be that the teachers lack the qualities of well-trained professionals or even that they feel insecure. Mittler and Mittler, 1982 have suggested that teachers are sometimes unable to create links with parents because the person involved is unsure of what she or he is doing or where they are heading. The Icelandic National Curriculum (1999) considers education and the well being of pupils as the joint task of school and the home. In this co-operation the main task is to emphasise pupils' learning and well being (National Curriculum, 1999). In the survey and the interviews most of the teachers in the small schools declared that the schools did not have a formal way of approaching parents. Evidently, it will be hard to achieve these objectives if co-operation with parents is not structured, and if parents are only contacted when problems arise. This kind of helplessness may have effects on pupils learning. Being a teacher involves an acceptance of certain responsibilities and the establishment of relationships with others, e.g. colleagues and parents. The most recent Educational Act in Iceland primarily emphasises the importance of teachers' relationships with parents (Educational Act, 1995, §2), and schools are directly obliged to provide for such relationships (Educational Act, 1995, §15).

The kind of contact between parents and schools found in this study is especially unfortunate as research findings show that parental involvement and parent contact with school is related to school performance, and that parental monitoring is positively related to school achievement in elementary school. Moreover, parental expectations for their children's achievement, parental child-rearing beliefs, and parental involvement in children's schoolwork have been related to cognitive performance and proved to be invaluable in determining appropriate educational experiences (Dockrell and McShane, 1993; Edwards and Redfern, 1988; Giangreco, Cloninger and Iverson, 1998; Okagaki and French, 1998; Roy McConkey, 1985).

The lack of co-operation, between; colleagues; teachers and parents, and teachers and pupils, as demonstrated in this study, raises many issues. One such issue is the interaction skills of these teachers. Another is the way in which this lack of co-operation may affect the school curriculum, and consequently, pupils' learning. Overall, the teachers in small schools do not take part in such practice. These findings contradict the findings of Nias (1989), who found that teachers want to work together in an atmosphere in which they receive help, sympathy, guidance and friendship at an individual level and where they share beliefs with their colleagues about education; a kind of co-operation in which they may extend their professional thinking and practice through both formal and informal contacts, their agreements and disagreements. However, this requires that individuals must take the risk of opening their practice to the scrutiny of their colleagues and seek support, reinforcement and encouragement (Nias et al., 1992:149). Because of the lack of co-operation among colleagues found in this study, it may be regarded that teachers miss the opportunity to improve their pedagogical skill and to master new approaches. They may miss the opportunity to change in a more fundamental ways, to reassess their beliefs about the nature and purposes of education, and to accept challenges to review their perspectives. It may be expected that shared beliefs develop over time, and establish only gradually in the thinking and practice of individuals. The process of resolving differences in belief is neither quick nor easy, but may be the necessary condition for growth within schools may be its collaborative culture and teachers' constant learning (Nias, et al., 1992).

Almost half of the teachers in this study seemed to exhibit a lack of self-understanding, which may help explain their lack of co-operation. Nias (1992) found that teachers' sense of unity within schools is closely related to their beliefs on collaboration and sense of self. Unity is achieved where beliefs are shared, articulated and enacted by all staff (Nias et al., 1992:26). Nias et al., (1992:67) also found that unity is not only reached by working together, but also with feeling together, which may indicate a sense of mutual enjoyment and work satisfaction is

created when beliefs are shared. Interestingly, Nias et al. (1992) found that a school's curriculum development could not be separated from the learning of the individual teacher. Thus, the role of learner is central to the teacher's profession. Nias (1992) maintains that such learning can occur as a result of a felt need to learn in the interaction and co-operation with colleagues, where teachers feel secure and emotionally supported. If such learning is meaningful, if challenged by the colleagues' support and feedback; it will provide emotional experience and affects teachers' behaviour and practice.

Five out of seven of the 'poor teachers' had over twenty years of teaching experience. These teachers had difficulties in explaining their own behaviour; they were distant or distracted, their work were disorganised resulting in the pupils being confused. This situation is in line with the findings of Price (1992) who found teachers' mid-life and mid-career often to be a time of stagnation, a period of time in teachers' lives that is characterised by frustration or burn-out (Price, 1992b: 172). The reason for this situation may be a lack of training and understanding of the importance of human relationships. Evidence from this study indicates that where appropriate programs for teacher learning are initiated, it is a constructive way to support teachers' personal needs for changes and development. In two of the small schools, the teachers had been involved in a school development projects. In the interviews they both expressed the importance of the project for their professional fulfilment and for the co-operation within the schools.

There may be many reasons for the problems identified in this study: teachers may be poorly trained; isolated; predominately part time and therefore not committed to their work; not resourceful in terms of curriculum facilities and most significantly, unprepared to exploit the potential advantages of small schools. One can also assume that the low salary scales for teachers have had a negative effect. This study examined responses between different designations of teachers. The analysis did not reveal significant difference between the responses of

unqualified teachers and qualified teachers. This is in contrast with the findings of Johnsen et al.(1989) who showed that the shortage of qualified teachers is a major problem on rural areas in Iceland (Johnsen et al., 1989). Unfortunately, the lack of qualified teachers in Icelandic schools may affect other teachers' professional fulfilment and commitment (Rosenholtz, 1991), as well as the schools as a whole.

What seems to be needed in the classroom is a supportive and sensitive atmosphere, in which teachers consider their own thinking and their own influence. There is a need for teachers who display good judgement, respond from and genuine consideration. As Hare said (1993), behaviour of this kind has been undervalued in educational circles. Teacher training in Iceland does not ensure skilful teacher-pupil interaction. Students in teacher training in Iceland are not specially trained in human interaction skills (Curriculum of the University of Akureyri 1999-2000; Curriculum of the Iceland University of Education, 1999-2000). It has been shown that training in human relations theories produces positive changes in teachers' attitudes and corresponding changes on improved classroom-learning climates (Thompson and Rudolph, 1992:100-102). Weinstein (1998) suggests that educators of teachers need to help prospective teachers to develop a broader, more inclusive notion of both caring and order. They need to understand positive relationships and engaging. Fuller et al. (1974) (cited by Cruickshank, 1996:62), found that beginning teachers are especially concerned about class control and about their own capabilities. Their concerns are not addressed in education courses. There may be a need for teacher education, which aims at bringing about a human and effective learning climate in the classroom, an environment that helps pupils *learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together*, and *learning to be* (Delors, 1996).

It is not certain that education promotes these qualities. How the objectives of education is transmitted is a question of great complexity. It might be helpful to reflect on Skúlasons' (1987) claim when he considers educational reform and what should be its priority. He

maintains that educational administration is founded on an ideology, which is concerned with what type of education it is desirable to offer. Such ideology cannot be idiosyncratic, and it cannot depend on the will of those who govern, nor on that of those who receive education. The initial problem is therefore not to find feasible approaches to organising educational provision, nor is it simply a financial issue. Only on a superficial level is educational administration a technical issue. At its very core, it rests on an intentional or unintentional evaluation of development, of the type of human intellect and attributes that should be fostered. Therefore, our first responsibility is to consider carefully, what type of person one wants to be; what type of individuals one wants to raise (Skúlason, 1987:304).

This study of small and large schools in Iceland has examined teachers' behaviour in relation to their practice and understanding. The study has contributed several significant findings to the literature on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom. Most important of these findings is that personal characteristics seem to be good predictors of teacher competence, and there appear to be relationships between particular personal characteristics and teachers' practices in the classroom. Fortunately, the literature suggests that attitude change can be accomplished through education (Hirst and Peters, 1991; Rogers and Freiberg, 1994; Thompson and Rudolph, 1992) and that attitude change can have considerable influence on pupils' learning (Butler, 1994; Carr and Krutz-Costes, 1994; Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991; Good and Brophy, 1991; Hart, 1996 and 1998; Nias, 1987 and 1992). This knowledge opens the possibility for future research. It also paves the way for a type of teacher training that emphasises the ways in which learning occurs, as well as teachers' understanding of themselves and the ways in which their perspectives to a situation at a given time may influence their various decisions and behaviours.

### **8.3 Recommendations for further Research**

Cooper and McIntyre (1996) claim that it is through understanding the thinking that underlies the practices of teachers and pupils that it will be possible to theorise about the limitations of current classroom practices. Their perspectives may be starting points for generating hypotheses about effective classroom practice.

In this study, some evidence has been provided to cast light on the initial questions; but at the same time they raise other questions. How is it possible to facilitate professional development? Is it possible to teach empathetic behaviour? Is it possible to teach 'innovative thinking'? Is it possible to change behaviour? How is it possible to help teachers understand their own behaviour and gain confidence? One way to answer questions of this kind is to obtain more information, with the aim of creating a model of teachers' behaviour.

It is important to take into account and to build upon the way in which these teachers already think about their work, to ensure that their experience and skills are used. It is also of interest to gain knowledge of how these teachers initiate their relationships with pupils, and in what way they organise their work generally. Research in this area is needed but it is not easy to conduct or interpret. However, an interesting possibility is to identify a group of experienced and successful teachers, who are committed to their profession, and to build and test a theory on these processes and their significance. It would be of interest to work with such a group for a period of two years, within the following framework:

Meetings could be held in which participants explain, describe and discuss teachers' behaviour. Literature sources could be explored to help to explain interaction theories, teachers' roles and the way in which teachers can be examples for pupils. At this stage a thorough investigation of teachers' understanding of empathetic behaviour would



need to be investigated as well as how they think such behaviour mediates pupils learning. Researchers in such a study would be required:

1. to film teacher-pupil interaction in the classrooms for a certain period of time and,
2. to design a model of behaviour for each individual teacher, to analyse these models and to compare them with the work of other members in the group.

This research would include an examination of the conditions that sustain empathetic behaviour and the situations (including class size and teaching approaches) under which such conditions are sustained. A second model would grow from this process, and the researchers would find pluses and pitfalls and to test the model. It would be of interest to include research on teachers' practises as well as pupils' attainment and engagement in the classroom although such a research process would be a challenge. Through it these teachers would play a central part in achieving professional progress.

For comparison, it would also be of interest to conduct research on the characteristics of and situations in both small and large schools. There is also a need for further research the reason why many teachers do not manage to utilise the apparent possibilities of teaching in small schools. Additionally, there is urgent need for further research on the situation of pupils who experience learning difficulties in Icelandic schools.

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## **Appendix I:**

### ***A letter regarding Pilot Study I***

#### **A Pilot study into the defining elements and position of small schools:**

Dear Teachers,

I have been in contact with your Deputy Head, and asked her to assist me in finding a number of teachers at the school who would be willing to answer the enclosed questionnaire. This is a pilot study, which has to be carried out before the actual survey.

It would be of great value for my research if you would be willing to answer the questionnaire, and make any comment or suggestion you think relevant. This will increase my chances of developing an effective questionnaire.

#### **Further information:**

It is the objective of the Educational Department of the University of Akureyri to provide students with special training in meeting the needs of pupils in small schools. In order for this to be possible, it is necessary to gather further information about the distinguishing elements and position of small schools. The term 'small school' refers to schools with fewer than 100 pupils.

This research, which will be carried out in North East Iceland, is aimed at collecting information based on the experience of teachers and head masters in all schools in the area, which fall under the definition of 'small schools'. The survey is put to teachers who hold 50% or more of a full time position. Further information will be gathered through interviews and with direct observations. As you may see, the research is quite wide-ranging and I hope it will deliver extensive information on the position and distinguishing factors in the work of small schools.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the questionnaires are anonymous, and only I, the undersigned will have access to the data.

Thank you for your kind co-operation.

---

Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir  
Lecturer  
University of Akureyri

## Appendix II:

### *A letter to teachers and head teachers, Study I*

Research into the defining elements and position of small schools in  
Northeast Iceland

A questionnaire sent to teachers and head masters in small schools in  
Northeast Iceland in January 1995

One of the objectives of the Educational Department of the University of Akureyri is to give prospective teachers training in meeting the individual needs of pupils in small schools. To be able to do so effectively, it is necessary to collect more information about the characteristics and situation of small schools. In this survey, the term 'small school' applies to schools with fewer than 100 students.

This research, which will be carried out in Northeast Iceland, is aimed at collecting information based on the experience of teachers and head teachers in all small schools in the area, which fall under the definition of 'small schools'. The survey is directed at teachers who can be assumed to have thorough knowledge of this type of schools. The survey is put to teachers who hold 50% or more of a full time position.

The objectives of this research are:

To collect information on the defining elements of small schools so that this information may later be applied to teaching practice at the Teacher Training Department of the University of Akureyri, and students at the Department may receive special training in meeting the needs of students in small schools,  
To understand and evaluate what factors involved in the work carried out in small schools are most likely to be effective to understand the needs of small schools.

Enclosed is a questionnaire, which represents the first phase of the research. Further information will be gathered through interviews with teachers and head teachers, and with direct observations in four schools, which will be selected when this information has been collected. In order to provide the best possible representation of the subject, it is important to get as wide a response as possible. Therefore, I kindly ask you to answer the questionnaire, and put your answers in the enclosed envelope and forward it. I would like to draw your attention to the enclosed letter from the Educational Officer of Northeast Iceland. I would also like to point out that the questionnaires are anonymous and that no one will have access to this data other than the undersigned.

Thank you for your kind co-operation,

Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir,  
Lecturer, University of Akureyri

## Appendix III:

### *The Postal Questionnaire*

#### **Questionnaire**

The questions are categorised according to subjects. Most of the questions are closed, with a five-point response pattern used; *strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree*. Other questions have slightly altered point response: *always, often, sometimes, seldom, never*. Some of the questions are open-ended.

An example:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree, or:  
always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

You are kindly asked to tick the appropriate box each time.

1. Are you:

male  
female

2. Are you:

class teacher  
teacher of special needs  
headteacher  
subject teacher

3. Are you a qualified teacher?:    yes    no

4. How long have you been a teacher?:  
1 - 5 years\_\_\_\_ 6 - 10 years \_\_\_\_ 11 - 5 years\_\_\_\_ 16 - 20 years  
\_\_\_\_ 21 years \_\_\_\_ or longer\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you been teaching at this particular school?:  
1 - 5 years\_\_\_\_ 6 - 10 years \_\_\_\_ 11 - 5 years\_\_\_\_ 16 - 20 years  
\_\_\_\_ 21 years \_\_\_\_ or longer\_\_\_\_
  
6. How many pupils are there in this school?:  
5 - 20 \_\_\_\_ 21 - 40 \_\_\_\_ 41 - 60 \_\_\_\_ 61 - 80 \_\_\_\_ 81 - 100 \_\_\_\_
  
7. Are you full time?  
Are you part time?  
If part time, what is the proportion of he job % \_\_\_\_
  
8. Have you taught in a school with more than 100 pupils?:  
yes  
no

***The characteristics of small schools:***

9. What do you consider as the key characteristics of small schools?:

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**10.** Do you think the characteristics of small schools are different from those of big schools?:

yes

no

**11.** If yes, what do you think are the main differences:

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**12.** In small schools it is possible to meet the needs of the individual pupil because of the limited number of pupils:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

**13.** In small schools it is possible to monitor individual pupil's progress because of the limited number of pupils:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

**16.** In small schools it is possible to achieve the aims of the curriculum because of the limited number of pupils:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

**17.** Teachers in small schools can help the pupils to prepare their homework:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐



18. I do know the individual needs of the pupils I teach:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

19. I consider that all teachers in this school know the pupils individual needs:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

20. The small community within the school promotes a close relationship between teachers and pupils:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

21. The small community promotes a close relationship with parents:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

22. The small community promotes close relationships' between pupils:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

23. If there is a close relationship between pupils in the school, how is it? (Among children of different age, gender etc).

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***Collaboration:***

**24.** Is there organised co-operation between teachers in the school?:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**25.** If so, how is it organised?: \_\_\_\_\_

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**26.** In this collaboration, is there a reciprocal attention towards pupils individual needs?:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**27.** Do the teachers in this school find it easy to negotiate with each other?:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**28.** My colleagues are supporting to me:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**29.** I am professionally isolated within the school:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**Co-operation with parents:**

30. The parents are encouraged to contact the teachers in the school:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

31. The teachers contact parents to seek information about their children:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

32. There is an organised co-operation with the parents:

agree      1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐      disagree

33. The parents obtain information about their child/children from me about the child's/children's conditions in the school:

agree      1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐      disagree

34. I contact the parents as soon a problem arise:

agree      1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐      disagree

35. I think it is necessary to get information from the parents about their child:

agree      1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐      disagree

36. I apply the information from the parents to my teaching:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

37. If you are applying the parents information to your teaching, in what way are you doing it?:

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***The curriculum:***

38. The teachers and the head teacher plan the school curriculum in collaboration:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

39. If this is so, how is that work carried out?:

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40. Children's special needs are considered in the school curriculum:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

If this is so, in what way is it done?:

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41. The aim of the school curriculum is that all pupils should have equal opportunities to learn:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

If this is so, how does it occur?:

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42. I monitor how the objectives of the school curriculum are applied to my teaching:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

43. If this is so, how do you conduct it ?:

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44. In my teaching there is coherence between the objectives in the school curriculum and the teaching approaches I apply:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

***Teaching methods:***

45. The pupils' tasks in my class are set according to their needs:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

46. I intentionally teach the pupils to organise their work:

agree    1□   2□   3□   4□   5□    disagree

47. If you do so, how do you approach that teaching?:

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48. I intentionally teach the pupils to work independently:

agree    1□   2□   3□   4□   5□    disagree

49. If you do so, how do you approach that teaching?: \_\_\_\_\_

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50. I intentionally teach the pupils to co-operate:

agree    1□   2□   3□   4□   5□    disagree

51. If you do so, how do you approach that teaching?:

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52. In my view, competition is encouraged in this school:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

53. If that is so, how is it

promoted?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

54. In small schools certain teaching methods are more appropriate than others:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

55. If you think so, what kind of approaches are they?:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

56. What teaching methods do you most often apply to your teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

57. I teach new topics/issues individually:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

**58.** I teach new topics/issues in the class as a whole:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**59.** I teach new topics/issues in small groups:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**60.** The teaching material is influential when I choose teaching approach:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**61.** The teaching equipment available in the school, influence what teaching methods I choose:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**62.** My teaching methods are chosen according to my mood each day:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**63.** My teaching methods are chosen according to the objectives in the school curriculum:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**64.** My teaching methods are chosen according to the individual programme of children with special needs:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐



65. My teaching methods are chosen according to the objectives set for my class

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

***Teaching arrangements:***

66. How are the teaching arrangements in your class?: (Tick more than one item if appropriate)

Do you teach:

one, age group together

two, age groups together

three, age groups together

other arrangements, what are they:

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67. In this school each teacher teaches on his own in his/her classroom:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

68. The teachers teach in pairs:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**69.** If the arrangements are different from what appears in question **67** and **68**, please say how the teaching is organised:

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**70.** The pupils in my class work individually:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**71.** The pupils in my class work in pairs:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**72.** The pupils in my class work in groups:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**73.** The pupils themselves choose their tasks for the lesson:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**74.** The pupils and I choose their tasks for the lesson collaboratively:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

**75.** I decide on my own what the pupils' tasks are:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

76. All pupils of the same age carry out the same tasks at the same time:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

77. The pupils are industrious:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

78. The pupils depend on me and wait for my help:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

79. In my classroom, the teaching equipment is arranged in an organised manner:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

80. I try to create a warm atmosphere in the classroom:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

81. How is the arrangement in your classroom?: (Please, tick more than one item if appropriate)

each child is sitting by itself

the children are sitting in pairs

the children are sitting together in groups

82. If you are teaching a mixed age group/groups please tell how you like that arrangement?

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***The pupils progress:***

83. The pupils progress is intentionally monitored:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

84. How?: 

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***Facilities:***

85. The school library is supplied with enough books:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

86. The school is well supplied with equipment:

agree    1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐    disagree

87. I have a classroom of my own:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

***Teaching preparation:***

88. I do have enough time for preparing my teaching:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

89. I prepare the teaching on my own in the school:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

90. I prepare the teaching in the school in collaboration with my colleagues:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

91. I prepare the teaching at home:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

***Collaboration with other schools:***

92. We are collaborating with other schools on a regular basis:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

If there is a regular collaboration between this school and other schools,  
please answer questions, **93 - 98 below.**

93. This collaboration is with:

one school.

more than one school.

94. The school/schools are:  
a small school/schools.  
a big school/schools.

95. In this collaboration the teachers share ideas:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

96. In this collaboration the schools' objectives are discussed:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

97. In this collaboration the teachers try to solve shared problems:

always ☐ often ☐ sometimes ☐ seldom ☐ never ☐

98. Other issues you would like to express concerning this collaboration:

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***Collaboration with the LEA:***

99. I do get support from the LEA:

yes

no

If yes, from which department do you get the service?:

psychological service

educational service

in-service training

**100.** I do make use of this support in my teaching:

yes

no

If yes, how?:

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**101.** I would like to get more support from the service:

yes

no

If yes, what kind of service would you like to get?:

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***School development:***

**102.** In this school there is an ongoing, intentional school development project:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

**103.** The work on this developmental-project has affected my attitude towards      schooling:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

**104.** The work on this developmental-project has affected my own teaching:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

105. I am not involved in a school developmental project, but I would like to do so:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

***Evaluation:***

106. Teachers effectiveness in this school is evaluated according to pupils examined results:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

107. In this school the teachers effectiveness is evaluated according to pupils general development:

always ☐   often ☐   sometimes ☐   seldom ☐   never ☐

108. There is a need for formal evaluation within the school on teachers effectiveness:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

109. There is a need for formal evaluation on teachers' effectiveness, on behalf of the Ministry of Education

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree

***Attitudes:***

110. I believe that all children can make progress in school:

agree      1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐      disagree



**111.** Learning difficulties occur because there is not a coherence between the children's abilities and the demands made by the school:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**112.** It is possible to reach far in meeting all pupils needs by "good teaching" and organised working habits:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**113.** I consider that the class-teacher is responsible for meeting all children's needs:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**114.** The ethos in this school does promote learning:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**115** In this school, the ethos is socially encouraging for the pupils

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**116.** The pupils in this school are unsettled:

always ☐    often ☐    sometimes ☐    seldom ☐    never ☐

**117.** I do have enough time for collaboration with my colleagues:

always ☐    often ☐    sometimes ☐    seldom ☐    never ☐

**118.** Teacher should be pupils' good friends:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**119.** Pupils should be teachers' good friends:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**120.** Teachers should show good example to pupils:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**121.** Teachers should, by their words and behaviour, aim at being a role model for pupils:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**122.** The teacher's only job should be direct teaching and transmission of knowledge:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**123.** Teacher should attempt to contribute to the pupils general development

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**124.** In this school the school-day is too long:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

**125.** The time pupils are in school each day is too short:

agree      1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐      disagree

*My sincere thanks for your contribution,*

*Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir*

## Appendix IV:

### *A letter to head teachers regarding study II and III*

[Head teachers' name]

9. January 1996

I am writing to you for help in a research study concerning small schools. The research is a part of my studies, for the degree of PhD at the University of Bristol, UK.

The aim of my present research is to examine the characteristics and situation of small schools with emphasis on teacher-pupil interaction and how interaction may affect pupils with special needs. I have already collected data in Iceland with a questionnaire. Information has been collected from teachers and head teachers. The questionnaire was sent out in January 1995. By small schools I refer to schools with less than 100 pupils.

For the purpose of comparison, the intention is to conduct this part of the research in 20 schools, ten small schools, and ten large schools in Northeast Iceland. A brief description of the present study and proposed work is enclosed, along with information about my previous work and research.

If you agree to my request, the research in your school would include the following: I would need to spend one day with one teacher; talk with him/her informally; to carry out structured observation in his/her classroom on teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom; and finally, to carry out a semi-structured interview with this teacher. It is necessary that the teacher who participates in the research has 5-10 years teaching experience. My intention is to interview and observe an equal number of female and male teachers. A letter to the teacher who would be willing to participate is enclosed.

It is my intention to collect this information during the months of January-February 1997. The exact timing of my research as well as size of the class will have to be agreed at a later date, between the head teacher and me. It is expected that the interview will take about 60 minutes. Your co-operation is vital for my research, and would be very much appreciated.

To save you having to reply to this letter, I will phone you soon for your response to this letter. All data in this study will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Thank you, in anticipation of your support.  
Yours faithfully,

Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir,  
Lecturer, University of Akureyri.

## Appendix V:

### *A letter to teachers, Study II and III*

December 1996

#### **Interaction and relationships in small schools and the implication for children with special needs.**

Dear Teacher

Your head teacher has given his permission for me to conduct a reasearch in your school and asked you to work with me for a day. Therefore I would like to provide the following information about my research and my work.

*My previous work:* My main concern is special education. For thirteen years I taught in an ordinary school, mostly children with reading difficulties and emotional problems. I was a special educational adviser for six years in Northeast Iceland, which included travelling to 35 schools in the area on a regular basis. I was a deputy head for one year in an ordinary school and for the last six years I have been a lecturer in the University College of Education in Reykjavik and University of Akureyri. During these years I have been running courses in special education and education generally throughout Iceland, as well as designing teaching material, translating books for young people with special needs and writing articles about special education, reading and teaching approaches. At five-year intervals I have been studying Special Education in Iceland, Norway and Britain.

*Background for the study:* Icelandic education is undergoing radical changes as a result of a decision to transfer the responsibility of compulsory schooling from the state to the local communities. These changes which took place in August 1996, involved major structural reform. As a result of these changes, a debate has emerged in Iceland about the viability of small schools. How this radical change will affect small schools is not quite clear at the moment. However many local communities are likely to face obstacles in this new responsibility. Despite this, many local communities consider the small school to be vital, and are dedicated to their success. Hardly any research has been carried out on small schools in Iceland. I believe that there is a need to acquire knowledge about small schools in other countries; their characteristics and situation, to be better able to answer questions about their importance in Iceland.

*My initial work on small schools:* In 1995, I carried out a first study. A selected sample of 17 small schools in Northeast Iceland was studied and headteachers and teachers completed questionnaires. The focus was on the characteristics and situation of small schools, to provide and identify

pedagogical and educational features of small schools. The results have now been processed and are to be analysed.

*Present study:* The purpose of the present study is (1) to obtain information about teachers' behaviour in the classroom in relation to their practice, and (2) to gather information about teachers' understanding of pupils' needs, their own behaviour and beliefs about education.

I will need to spend one day with you; to carry out structured observation in your classroom on the teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom; and finally, to carry out a semi-structured interview with you. I will contact you before my visit to the school to explain the purpose of the research and to arrange an appropriate time for the visit.

The sample of the schools consists of ten small schools and ten large schools.

*Proposed work:* Following the creation of baseline data on the characteristics and situation of small schools, a new framework for the study of small schools will be piloted in Iceland. This will examine the role small schools play in the education of children with special needs, and how this is linked to teacher-pupils interaction, and to the community itself. I believe that many of the initiatives in which both pupils and adults collaborate in small schools and their close relationships not only enriches the education which the children receive, but also their social and emotional life. Therefore I want to observe this interaction and identify implications for children with special needs. Specially, I want to look at the subtle teacher-pupil interaction that emerges by non-verbal communication, and the dynamic complexity that is revealed through teachers' listening skills and their empathy.

*The outcomes:* The outcomes will be taken into consideration in order to produce new techniques for examining small schools and for understanding of the link between teachers, pupils and community.

Once again, I would like to stress that your co-operation is vital for the next stage of the research to get underway.

Yours sincerely, Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir, MEd.

## **Appendix VI:**

### ***The Observation Scheme***







## **Appendix VII:**

### ***The Interview Questions***

Research on teacher belief on their on interaction and behavior in the classroom and how this might effect pupils with special needs

Collected first, general information: age, teaching experience, teaching experience in this school, number pupils in the schools, size of class, multi-grade teaching, not multi-grade teaching.

#### **Cooperation**

Can you describe how co-operation within the school is organised?

Do you co-operate with teachers from other schools? If your answer is yes; what form does this co-operation take?

Do you feel professionally isolated? If so, in what way does this express itself?

What does your co-operation with parents involve?

What information do you get from parents regarding pupils?

How do you adopt information gained from parents about pupils in your teaching?

#### **Interaction**

What do you consider most important in the interaction of teachers and pupils in the classroom?

How do you build up trust between you and the pupils?

Which skills do you consider necessary in your interaction with pupils?

In what way do you consider you make an example to your pupils?

To which of your pupils needs do you think you are most sensitive?

In what way do you feel you can take pupils emotional state into account?

Can you describe how you listen to pupils most effectively, both verbally and non-verbally?

How do you show the pupils understanding?

How do you use your voice in the classroom?

How do you stimulate pupils learning?

Can you describe your method of discipline in the classroom.

Are the pupils involved in creating the methods of discipline?

Can you describe the connection between your teaching approaches and the interaction that occurs in the classroom?

What do you consider could be cause problems between you and the pupils?

#### Individual Needs

What is our opinion towards pupils with special needs?

Where do you think pupil with special needs should attend school?

How do you meet the individual needs of the pupils in class?

Do you give priority to attending to some pupils at the cost of giving less attention to other pupils during classes? If so, what is the criterium?

How do you analyse the learning needs of your pupils?

How do you understand the term 'special needs'?

#### Teaching Approaches

How do you choose the teaching methods you use in your class?

Do you organise differentiated tasks in your class or are all children given the same tasks?

#### Identifying Features of Small Schools

Do you think small schools have any particular opportunities or obstacles compared to large schools? If so, please identify these?

How do you think your school manages to use such opportunities?

Do you think that multi-grade classes influence our choice of teaching methods? If so, in which way?

Do you think that multi-grade classes affect your interaction with pupils? If so, in which way?

What is your opinion of teaching multi-grade classes?